

Aging as an Epistemology of Sustainability: Reimagined Designs in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*

Majda Atieh

Department of English, Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman

Abstract: This essay highlights how Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1998) proposes aging as either consciousness or disengagement with sustainability. The narrative presents a revisit of the historical development of America starting with the Great Depression in the 1890s, then the racial discrimination and the drought of the 1930s, leading to the National Environmental Act in 1970. This period refers to America's aging that is marked with environmental damage, drastic decline of outputs, farm closures, stringent racial exclusion, and infectious diseases. *Paradise* contextualizes the nation's depressive aging to visualize its translation in the American identity's perception of somatic and mental aging and re-imagine an alternative philosophy of aging as awareness of continuities. As such, aging is presented in the narrative as a new recognition of the body in light of two opposing epistemologies of living. In particular, *Paradise* foregrounds one's choice of either a subversive sustainable aging that activates human/non-human, natural, and communal connection or inherent non-sustainable aging that degenerates into a pathology of genetic and racial rift, environmental damage, and mortality. The symptomatic presence of such varied epistemologies of aging is extended into architectural aging and narratological aging. *Paradise* presents Ruby and the Convent as two exemplary communal designs that reflect the struggle of negotiating aging within the existing historical, social, and economic contexts. As such, the narrative reveals how unsustainable aging constructs a design of genetic isolation, detrimental memory, and reductive chronology. On the other hand, *Paradise* presents sustainable aging as the perception of a biophilic design that displays tendency of connectivity and renewal through its architectural features of regenerative biomimicry and biodiversity, circadian re-memory, and openness.

Keywords: Aging, sustainability, connectivity, mortality, rememory, architecture

This article addresses cases of aging that display either consciousness or disengagement with sustainability, as presented in Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1998).

The narrative reimagines the historical development of America starting with the Great Depression in the 1890s, then the racial discrimination and the drought of the 1930s, leading to the National Environmental Act in 1970. This period refers to America's aging that is marked with environmental damage, drastic decline of outputs, farm closures, stringent racial exclusion, and infectious diseases. *Paradise* contextualizes the nation's depressive aging to visualize its translation in the American identity's consequent struggle of negotiating aging within such historical, social, and economic developments. In particular, *Paradise* presents Ruby and the Convent as two foundational communities that showcase one's choice of either subversive sustainable aging that activates human/non-human, natural, and communal connection or inherent non-sustainable aging that degenerates into a pathology of genetic and racial rift, environmental damage, and mortality.

However, *Paradise* extends the localized translation of aging to counter the 1890 grand narrative on the American nation's depressive history. *Paradise* contributes cases of aging that transcend the recognition of the body, remap geography, and rewrite history. In particular, *Paradise* reveals how the aging communities of Ruby and the Convent imagine closed/open architectural geographies that create neo-grand/counter narratives. As such, Ruby's unsustainable aging constructs a design of genetic isolation, detrimental memory, and reductive chronology. On the other hand, the Convent's sustainable aging perceives a biophilic design that displays the tendency of connectivity and renewal through its architectural features of regenerative biomimicry and biodiversity, circadian re-memory, and openness.

Recalling the grand narrative of America's depressive history, *Paradise* imagines a town that struggles with the ramifications of the big depression. In 1890, the prophetic figure of Zechariah Morgan and a group of ex-slaves who comprise nine complete "eight-rock" families travel, at God's command, after a series of race-based denials from public life and job opportunities initiated by various pioneer communities, black as well as white, in Louisiana and Mississippi to Oklahoma. Then the crisis of their Disallowing from Fairly, Oklahoma, provokes their frustration in the promise of life, development and growth. Fairly's predicament urges them to establish Haven (1891), a far-away place in Oklahoma, as a separate "place they could call home" (Fraile-Marcos 2003, 12), and a foundation for their regenerative faith in equal life and progress.

Zechariah embraces a vision of "aging as growing", for his newly established community projects sustainability that is founded on affiliative allegiances. The danger of filial and racial allegiances that breed tribal faction and degeneration has

always haunted Zechariah: “scattering would have frightened him. The breakup of the group or tribe or consortium of families” (Morrison 1998b, 192). Zechariah envisions a community bound by ties, not of kinship or race, but of belief in freedom, equality, regeneration, and nonviolence. So, the Old Fathers have entertained a connection-based rather than a genetic definition of blackness. In other words, the blackness of Zechariah’s original community is a marker of its sustainable growth and rebirth rather than of racial purity, deterioration, or closure as his community exhibits genetic diversity and openness. For instance, the name of one of the founding fathers of Haven reflects genetic hybridity and continuity. In her research of Ruby’s history, Patricia Best Cato comments on the typically “Blackhorse feature of stick-straight hair” that runs in the old Blackhorse family (Morrison 1998b, 198). In this regard, critic Justine Tally argues that it is clear that “‘racial purity’ among the first families of Ruby is questionable anyway” (Tally 1999, 24). The Old Fathers’ acceptance of outsiders and women of different colours further emphasizes their observation of open and healthy aging. Zechariah’s growing community embraced “the orphans, males and females aged twelve to sixteen, who spotted the travellers and asked to join”, and they “simply snatched up” two toddlers “because the circumstances in which the children were found wouldn’t let them do otherwise” (Morrison 1998b, 189). In spite of the shame of “seeing one’s pregnant wife or sister or daughter refused shelter” (Morrison 1998b, 95), Zechariah’s community refuses to age into a depressive and pathological version through racially reductive allegiances. Instead, this group “reacts against the danger of being obliterated by the rest of society by creating a solidly knit community characterized by the unity of its members in a common cause: the quest for a place where they feel safe” (Fraile-Marcos 2003, 12).

The exodus of Zechariah and the rejected ex-slaves involved a concern with the reclamation of a sacred spatial architecture that becomes symptomatic of their regenerative and sustainable aging. In Black history, the space of the kitchen has connoted danger as it symbolizes the power of the white system that has inflicted various forms of torture, humiliation, and ensuing mortality on slaves, such as the rape of black women and a consequent castration of black manhood.¹ To transcend this fatal history, the Old Fathers aspire to reclaim a kitchen that asserts primordial origin and perennial rebirth. The Old Fathers focus on their pride that

1 See Betty Chroninger’s *From Strange Fruit to Fruitful Kitchens: The Space of the Kitchen in Toni Morrison’s Novels* that historically examines the African American presence in the white kitchen.

none of their women had ever worked in a white man's kitchen or nursed a white child. Although field labor was harder and carried no status, they believed the rape of women who worked in white kitchens was if not a certainty a distinct possibility – neither of which they could bear to contemplate. So they exchanged that danger for the relative safety of brutal work. It was that thinking that made a community 'kitchen' so agreeable. (Morrison 1998b, 99)

As such, the black kitchen should become the relocated and regenerative alternative to the mortal white kitchen. For Zechariah's community, the black kitchen acquires the distinctive shape of an Oven, a large and solid design of brick and iron that is used to nourish the community and remind its members of their achievement. Zechariah's objective behind building the Oven is to realize sustainability and immortality: "having been routed from office by whites [... Zechariah] wanted to make a permanent feature in that open land so different from Louisiana" (Morrison 1998b, 99). So, the architecture of the Oven simulates Haven's independent vision of continual growth that is distinct from the destructive growth of other established white and black communities.

Zechariah's sustainable aging is extended into his design of biomimicry. Zechariah's choice of his sacred space of Haven coincides with a domestic space. He follows the instructions and footsteps of a mythical "walking man" (Morrison 1998b, 97-98). This mythical figure carries a satchel like a school-teacher. The language he teaches entertains no distinction between divine and domestic. The divinely chosen place is associated with a domestic symbol, an intact guinea fowl:

Through a parting in the grass, [Rector] saw the walking man standing, looking around. Then the man squatted, opened his satchel and began rummaging in it.... There in the trap, *bait and pull string undisturbed* [emphasis mine], was a guinea fowl. Male, with plumage to beat the band. Exchanging looks, they left it there and moved to the spot where they believed the walker had spread the items from his satchel. Not a thing in sight. Only a depression in the grass. Big Papa leaned down to touch it. Pressing his hand into the flattened grass, he closed his eyes. (Morrison 1998b, 98)

The depression on grass reenacts a prostration for prayer that reflects Zechariah's doctrine of connectivity and biophilia. The acquisition of Zechariah's future sacred space involves non-violence, insistence on connectivity, and biodiversity. The land "belonged to a family of State Indians, and it took a year and four months of negotiation, of labor for land, to finally have it free and clear" (Morrison 1998b, 99). Tally argues that this negotiation further emphasizes the Old Fathers' respect for cultural plurality and their resentment of racism:

Zechariah and his followers work to become rightful owners of their new town; given nothing after the era of Reconstruction, denied even the most menial work in retribution after their participation in Reconstruction politics, they nonetheless respect the rights of the Native Americans and negotiate a peaceful transfer of land. (Tally 1999, 22)

Zechariah's structural design of the sacred space also translates the spatial osmosis that reflects openness and awareness of human, natural, and cultural connections.

The structure of the space of the Oven exhibits volatility and hostility to biological differences and gender hierarchies. The Oven represents a public space that shapes Ruby's social gatherings and practices. Zechariah's architecture of this public space reveals fluidity. The Oven embraces a mutable space that nullifies any physical distance between private life and public life and consequently obliterates gender boundaries. The Oven is both a shared hearth and a site of community baptisms:

Maybe they ought to go back to the way they did things..... When everybody was too busy building, stocking, harvesting to quarrel or think up devilment. The way it was before Mount Calvary was completed. When baptisms were held in sweet water.... Slowly, then, hand in hand, heads on supporting shoulders, the blessed and saved waded to the banks and made their way to the Oven. To dry, embrace, congratulate one another. (Morrison 1998b, 103)

In this concern, Linda Krumholz highlights the fluidity of the Oven's structure by arguing that the Oven's shape communicates clear associations with both women and men:

Morrison makes the Oven symbolize both male and female, womb and phallus. The Oven is both object and subject, passive and active, womb and mouth, head and heart; it is 'round as a head, deep as desire', with the sacred and disputed words on the 'Oven's iron lip', 'at the base of the Oven's mouth'. (Krumholz 2002, 6-7)

These domestic/private/divine/and public attributes of the Oven connote the design of regenerative biomimicry that distinguishes the sustainability of a community that grows and ages collectively.

However, the Haven community starts to age reductively and degenerate into stringent racial exclusion and ensuing displacement and relocation. A drift symbolically ruptures Zechariah's growing community and splits the space between two men. Before launching his "aging" journey, Zechariah (originally named Coffee) precipitates a veil between him and his twin Tea. This incident of veiling is caused by Tea's choice of reducing his sustainable growth and aging to biological denial and mental regression (recession into a child-like status). Tea violates the Black code of defiance and becomes a shameful and profane symbol of accommodation to the white order and colour:

When [Coffee] and his twin [Tea] were walking near a saloon, some whitemen, amused by the double faces, encouraged the brothers to dance. Since the encouragement took the form of a pistol, Tea, quite reasonably, accommodated the whites, even though he was a grown man, older than they were. (Morrison 1998b, 302)

This racial or filial obsession leads to the disallowal of Tea from the divine community that Coffee/Zechariah establishes later. A bullet bars Tea from Zechariah's journey to the private and divine town:

Coffee took the bullet in his foot instead. From that moment they weren't brothers anymore. Coffee began to plan a new life elsewhere. He contacted other men, other former legislators who had the same misfortune as his – Juvenal DuPres and Drum Blackhorse. They were the three who formed the nucleus of the Old Fathers. Needless to say, Coffee didn't ask Tea to join them on their journey to Oklahoma. (Morrison 1998b, 302)

Tea's exclusion is the first sign of the breakdown of a community that shifts to reductive aging, race-based alliances and "lethal discourses of exclusion" (Morrison 1993), which perform genocide of the ancestral language of cultural solidarity.² Such incident of biological denial leads to depressive aging translated in moral decay and economic depression (Morrison 1998b, 302).

The Haven community witnesses Disallowing Part Two that bars its members from the possibility of human life and growth. National and international politics interfere and change the town's economic development. Haven starts to decay, and its inhabitants migrate to more prosperous places. After World War II, Black soldiers "who had been ready to give their lives for their country see their heroic stature demeaned by the violence against them" (Fraile-Marcos 2003, 13-14). During their migration, Ruby Morgan falls ill and dies "on the waiting room bench" after white hospitals refuse to treat her and while a "nurse [is trying] to find a [vet] to examine her" (Morrison 1998b, 113). Ruby Morgan is considered by Ruby's patriarchs as the originator of continuity, for bearing K.D. Morgan, "the sole 'son' the [Morgan] family would ever have" (Morrison 1998b, 143) and the only male heir. All of these factors constitute the hypocrisy of "Disallowing Part Two" (Morrison 1998b, 194) that leads to Haven's degeneration into an extreme politics of reductive protection:

Ten generations had known what lay Out There: space once beckoning and free, became unmonitored and seething; became a void where random and organized evil erupted when and where it chose—behind any standing tree, behind the door of any house, humble or grand[...]But lessons had been learned and re-learned in the last three generations about how to protect a town. (Morrison 1998b, 16)

Facing economic and moral change and seeking decontamination from humiliation (Morrison 1998b, 16), the New Fathers promote an intergenerational transmission of their racial discourse and re-assert the timelessness of the historical model of Coffee's detrimental memory: "They carried the rejection of 1890 like a bullet in the brain" (Morrison 1998b, 109). As such, the woman's dead body

2 See Kamwangamalu's "Social Change and Language Shift: South Africa" that examines the impact of language shift on the formation of identity, 225-42.

becomes a symbolic representation of Ruby's community. Naming the town after the diseased Ruby Morgan signifies the mortality of the community. Ruby's community adopts reductive protection from change that necessitates the protection of the bodies of its women. Consequently, Ruby men impose spatial exclusion of Ruby women, which degenerates into genetic pathology. The New Fathers redesign Ruby's geographical borders to create an isolated community from the violence indigenous in other cities of the 1970s. Ruby is a place where women feel totally safe and protected:

Unique and isolated, [it] was a town justifiably pleased with itself. It neither had nor needed a jail ... a sleepless woman could always rise from her bed, wrap a shawl around her shoulders and sit on the steps in the moonlight ... because nothing at the edge thought she was prey. (Morrison 1998b, 8-9)

Instilling such depressive borders, men in Ruby become ever cautious against intruders who might destabilize the tranquillity of their hard-won community.

Consequently, Ruby's new design violates biomimicry through a historical breach in the sacred/public/and private space along gender lines. With the establishment of Ruby, the domestic and divine symbol of community, the Oven, gradually loses its culinary value and degenerates into a shrine that isolates women. The detrimental memory of Ruby demolishes the architecture of the Oven: "The ex-soldiers broke up the Oven and loaded it into two trucks" (Morrison 1998b, 16). Breaking and transplanting the Oven demolishes Zechariah's hybrid architecture of the Oven. The relocation of the Oven symbolizes an uprooting from the founding soil for communal value: "There was no need to wonder if moving the Oven had been a mistake; whether it needed its original soil as foundation for the respect and wholesome utility that was its due" (Morrison 1998b, 112). By altering the location and structure of the Oven, Ruby men emphasize its value as a material construction susceptible to fracture rather than an intangible marker of sustainability. Ruby women suffer segregation from the communal kitchen. They become alienated and confined to multiple quarters presented in the narrative as kitchens (Morrison 1998b, 100), private gardens (Morrison 1998b, 89), and bedrooms (Morrison 1998b, 187). This removal ascribes a definite architecture to the Oven and underrates its culinary value of subsistence:

Minus the baptisms the Oven had no real value. What was needed back in Haven's early days had never been needed in Ruby. The trucks they came in brought cookstoves as well. The meat they ate clucked in the yard, or fell on its knees under a hammer, or squealed through a slice in its throat. (Morrison 1998b, 103)

In other words, the Oven is transformed into a spatial reflection of Ruby's reductive metamorphosis.

The racial disallowal of Ruby men scars their memory. Such trauma transforms their aging into a generationally sustained pathology of limited memory and disconnection that develops into mental, physiological, and genetic impotence. The historical disallowal of their women by black and white communities "stripp[ed]" Ruby men of "masculine power, reducing them to a shameful impotence, which they refuse consciously to acknowledge [...and] shatter[ed] their already fragile and embattled sense of manhood" (Read 2005, 529). The shameful "repercussions of this patriarchally inflicted wound" (Weinstein 1996, 106) of disallowal becomes Ruby men's only reductive memory. Ruby's elders perform a "castration ritual" (Croutier 1989, 129) on the new generations by constantly reminding them of their past of disallowal through the story of the Oven's inscription. They even change the biblical narration of birth into an aging narrative through constantly referring to their disallowal in the annual staging of the school's Christmas play (Morrison 1998b, 86, 195, 210). Thus, the new generations of Ruby men are also transformed into "congenital eunuchs". Another symptom of Ruby men's timeless castration pertains to their fear of the female's sexual energy and their perception of women as obstacles to their male power and the racial purity or "chastity" of their 8-rock blood. For example, during the Second Grand Tour, the young twins Steward and Deacon Morgan felt threatened and almost castrated by the sexual agency implied in the scene of the nineteen women. As Marni Gauthier observes,

the sexual energy of the scene ... elides the vision and rules of female chastity that the brothers enforce in Ruby, and simultaneously contains the seeds of the 8-rock fear of miscegenation that can only occur when Ruby citizens couple outside the coal-black bloodlines innate to Morgan males. (Gauthier 2005, 402)

The suggested scene of adultery between the nineteen women and the photographer signifies the epitome of threatened manhood for Ruby men.

Ultimately, insomnia and sleep disorder evolve as another symptom of Ruby's pathological aging and impotence. Steward and Deacon carry "the rejection of 1890 like a bullet in the brain" (Morrison 1998b, 109) that rids them of sound sleep. They stay up and are restless most of their nights, processing thoughts of their fathers' earlier castration:

Steward leashed the dogs and unlatched the horse barn. His preference was to mount around four a.m. and ride Night till sunrise Saddled on Night, he rediscovered every time the fresh wonder of knowing that no one's own land you could never be lost the way Big Papa and Big Daddy and all seventy-nine were leaving Fairly, Oklahoma. On foot and completely lost, they were It was the shame of seeing one's pregnant wife or sister or daughter refused shelter that had rocked them, and changed them for all time. (Morrison 1998b, 95)

Likewise, Deacon's insomniac and "most powerful" memory is of the Second Grand Tour that recalls his castration by the miscegenation and sexual energy in the scene of the nineteen women (Morrison 1998b, 107, 109-10).

The impotence and insomnia of the aging twin leaders ultimately degenerate into an irritating and even violent form of interference. For instance, Deacon exercises frequent shooting and walking around the sacred site of the Oven. This double activity reflects his paranoia and restlessness:

The morning after the meeting at Calvary, pleased with his bird quota and fired, not tired, from no sleep, he decided to check out the Oven before opening up the bank. (Morrison 1998b, 110)

Reverend Misner even associates Deacon's checking of the Oven with hunting: "Hard to figure, but I don't like the way Deek's face looks when he's checking the Oven. He does it every day God sends now. More like hunting than checking" (Morrison 1998b, 117). Steward's hunting activity also becomes a violent form of interference. Steward is used to "riding his own land with free wind blowing Night's mane, the thought of that level of helplessness [makes] him

want to shoot somebody” (Morrison 1998b, 96). The most hideous translation of Ruby men’s vengeful interference culminates in the twins’ “leadership” (Morrison 1998b, 275) of a plan to “hunt” the Convent women (Morrison 1998b, 5).

The aging narrative of castration translated in the Oven, the architecture of disallowal, predicts a childbearing disability and reductive physical aging. The birth or prosperity of children becomes difficulty, impossibility, or rarity:

The women nodded when the men took the Oven apart, packed, moved and reassembled it. But privately they resented the truck space given over to it—rather than a few more sacks of seed, rather than shoats or even a child’s crib ... a good thing, she thought, as far as it went, but it went too far. A utility became a shrine. (Morrison 1998b, 103)

For instance, Soane Morgan lost her male children, Easter and Scout, during the war (Morrison 1998b, 100-01). Dovey Morgan could not bear any child due to multiple miscarriages (Morrison 1998b, 96). Arnette Fleetwood aborted the fetus she conceived out of wedlock (Morrison 1998b, 179-80, 250). Sweetie Fleetwood delivered malformed children and watched them for six years, culminating in the death of her daughter, Save-Marie (Morrison 1998b, 57, 124-25, 295).

Ruby’s signs of detrimental aging that features a reductive memory generate an aging narrative that only associates women with the profane. For them, the outsider woman only recalls the anomaly that trespasses the male domain of power and threatens this privilege, for she creates disorder either as an “outsider temptress” or a “potential loose insider” (Fraile-Marcos 2003, 16). The outsider woman is a toxic reminder of the undesired racial difference within the community:

The generations had to be racially untampered with but free of adultery too. ‘God bless the pure and holy’ Unadulterated and unadulteried 8-rock blood held its magic as long as it resided in Ruby. That was their recipe. (Morrison 1998b, 217)

So, the impure (not 8-rock), unholy (fornicator), or coloured woman is rejected. Ironically, Ruby women’s protection and acceptance is restrictively interpreted as pure black skin colour and obedience. On the other hand, the “racially

impure" conundrum shows how Ruby's affiliative aging degenerates into and reproduces the genetic filiation of the condemned system of slavery.³

In *Paradise*, Ruby's detrimental memory becomes the theme of its collective architecture of genetic isolation featured in similar patterns of closures, such as curtailing women's participation and communication in social affairs. The pathology of Ruby's aging is also diagnosed by their dementia that takes the form of delusional and amnesiac curtailment of women's participation in social affairs and ethical formations. One example is the reconciliation between Arnette and K.D., which is supposed to instill "the ideals of participatory democracy and nonviolence" (Cornier 2002, 650). Participatory democracy usually requires "extensive and active engagement of citizens in the self-governing process [...and] in all matters that affect them in their common lives" (Barber 1995, 921). However, the exclusive exchange in the Fleetwood house exemplifies how social affairs are managed by amnesia in Ruby. Men negotiate these affairs without their women and their supposed growth "attempt remains seriously flawed in its exclusion of women" (Morrison 1998b, 650). Contrary to the ideal of tolerance, both Arnette and her mother are absent from the meeting of "those concerned", and K.D. is present with "his uncle Deek and Stewart, Reverend Misner, Arnette's father and brother" (Morrison 1998b, 54). Also, the "black and red fist" debate marks another pathology of communal violence and generational discontinuity and eminent mortality. The new fist on the back wall of the Oven marks a violent rift and challenge to the Old Fathers' inherited inscription and the New Fathers' reading of this inscription. Ruby women try to wash but could not remove the fist painting: "it produced a nagging, hateful pain that Kate's and Anna's scrubbing could not erase" (Morrison 1998b, 102). This "washing" incident reveals that Ruby women are not full participants in this generational debate, and even their healthy and meditative role for generational continuity and sustainability is curtailed and forgotten. Instead, Ruby women are demonized as they secretly mediate their healthy interpretations of the Oven's debate in their separate quarters. Dovey Morgan secretly observes that Ruby men

were in a battle over words attached to the lip of the Oven. An argument fueled in part ... by what nobody talked about: young people in trouble or acting up behind every door. (Morrison 1998b, 83)

3 See Edward Said's discussion on the overlap between filiation and affiliation in *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, 20-30.

Soane Morgan clandestinely investigates the fist battle and comments that “there were no whites (moral or malevolent) around to agitate or incense them, make them ugly-up the Oven and defy the adults” (Morrison 1998b, 102). Patricia separately records and analyses Ruby’s history in her private quarters, the bedroom and the kitchen (Morrison 1998b, 185-217). Lone DuPres, the midwife who represents the evolution of the community, becomes a clandestine intruder on the racially exclusive space that effaces her memory (Morrison 1998b, 269-80). In Ruby, the amnesia of women’s interpretations is predicted as a side effect of the Oven’s relocation from the environment of biodiversity. The link between environmental damage and detrimental memory recalls the curse of scattering that haunted Zechariah’s visions:

The one who saw scrolls of curses and women in baskets ... the one who saw the result of disobedience. The punishment for not showing mercy or compassion was a scattering among all nations, and pleasant land made desolate. All of that would fit nicely for Zechariah Morgan: the curse, the women stuffed into a basket with a lid of lead and hidden away in a house. (Morrison 1998b, 192)

Symbolically, the community’s pathological aging is visible in its memory impairment and amnesia of the past.

Another side effect of Ruby’s pathological aging is mental recession and regression. Ruby elitists’ exegesis of Zechariah’s conundrum “Beware the Furrows of His Brow” is a major example of their mental recession. The men of Ruby are willing to defend the written text of the Oven based on the oral testimony of Miss Esther’s “finger” memory as a five-year-old (Morrison 1998b, 83). Representing the elitist New Fathers, Steward exclaims:

Esther never made a mistake of that nature in her life. She knew all there was to know about Haven and Ruby too. She visited us before we had a road. She named this town, dammit. (Morrison 1998b, 86-87)

The problem of the New Fathers’ interpretation is its attribution to an immature transmitter who does not have “good memory” (Mernissi 1987, 35), one of the criteria for validating the transmitter of any narrative. As a five-year-old child, the credence of Esther’s memory cannot be determined. Her childhood memory

represents a stage of linguistic babble that has not reached final formulation. So, Miss Esther does not belong to the entourage of validated sources.

The declining Ruby presents presbyopia, the age-related physiological degeneration that blurs the reading of the Oven's text and projects constant pathological aging. Zechariah is the one who protects the sacred space of the Oven and opens it to the followers through the combination of his inscription: "Furrow of His Brow". Anatomically and dermatologically speaking, the brow furrows refer to the forehead's frown lines that usually become more visible with forehead aging. Applying the anatomical significations of the brow's furrows to the generational controversy over the cryptic inscription of the Oven leads to the same conclusion: your reading of aging. However, all suggested readings by the representatives of Ruby's generations reflect an impaired vision as they divert from the core and tangible reference. One reading of this inscription is "Beware the Furrow of His Brow" (Morrison 1998b, 86). The second reading is "Be the Furrow of His Brow" (Morrison 1998b, 87). The third reading is "We are the Furrow of His Brow" (Morrison 1998b, 298). Comparing these interpretations to the behaviour of these conflicting generations implies their failure to read and apply the signs correctly. Ruby's young generations are not updating the motto by enforcing "we" or "be". Rather, they are taking the agency to reinforce the rift. Their interpretation is also another "misreading of the warning. They also re-adopt the same rhetoric [of the New Fathers] by finding fault with the present and moving themselves into (limited action)" (Fraile-Marcos 2003, 20). Focusing on the first part of the conundrum "be/we/beware" does not induce any change or difference. They all ignore the part that reflects the meaning and approach to aging: "Furrow of His Brow". So, Ruby's generations collectively age and decline in their racially exclusive space.

The presbyopia of Ruby men ultimately "misreads" the neighbouring Convent women as unruly agency. In Ruby men's politics of racial intolerance, the Convent women are racially impure and pollute the divine 8-rock blood in the first place. This hypothesis of female profanity explains why Ruby men consider Convent women as an obscene and perverted group of coven's "witches" and "sluts" who wrecked the peace of Ruby's kingdom (Morrison 1998b, 276). The Convent women are dangerous because they have trespassed physically, genetically, and ideologically on the frontiers of Ruby's divine/public and private spaces. These outsider temptresses anarchize Ruby's patriarchal system through committing adultery and adulteration (as in the affairs of Consolata and Deacon

and Gigi and K.D.), befriending Ruby women (Lone, Soane, and Bellie Delia), and allegedly aborting their babies (as in Soane and Arnette's cases). This adulterous and criminal locus of the Convent deflates the myth of Ruby's abysmal and unbridgeable borders and exposes their age-related fragility and vulnerability. Ruby's nine men resort to chronic violence to preserve their fading power and control on Ruby. They set the dawn of a July day as the deadline for the Convent women's lives (Morrison 1998b, 3).

Ruby men's pathological aging that presents presbyopia, memory loss, and hallucination becomes collective as it extends to the community's women. For instance, Sweetie Fleetwood seemingly perpetuates Ruby men's stereotypes of the Convent women by stigmatizing them, calling them "demons", and later claiming that they "snatched" and made her go there (Morrison 1998b, 130). Also, Sweetie conveys her aging symptoms of dementia and hallucination about the Convent women. For example, Reverend Cary justifies the plans for the hideous attack on the Convent women based on Sweetie's report:

Sweetie said they tried their best to poison her. I heard that too. Got caught in a snowstorm out that way and took shelter with them ... she heard noises coming from somewhere in that house. Sounded to her like little babies crying. (Morrison 1998b, 275)

Similarly, Arnette Fleetwood attacks the Convent women and blames them for the death of the baby that she herself injured through attempts to force a miscarriage (Morrison 1998b, 250, 179-80).

Ruby's unsustainable aging ends with its evolution as it bars "ongoing accommodation" (Guinier 1998, 252) and degenerates into coercive mortality. The obsession and obligation of keeping Ruby safe from outside intrusions urges its leading nine men to turn their anger and vent their frustration on the women of the Convent (Tally 1999, 65). Illusive power and violence interlace for the Ruby patriarchs. Legitimized by their mythical disallowal, Ruby men resort to violence and the plotting of murder to rid the Convent of its women. The Convent residents become disruptive agents for Ruby's male power, as Reverend Cary exclaims: "You think they got powers? *I know* they got powers. Question is whose power is stronger" (Morrison 1998b, 276-77). Reversing to genetic infanticide, Ruby men converge to and assimilate the racial violence in the white order. Reverend Misner concludes that Ruby men

think they have outfoxed the whiteman when in fact they imitate him. They think they are protecting their wives and children, when in fact they are maiming them. And when the maimed children ask for help, they look elsewhere for the cause. (Morrison 1998b, 306)

By first attacking the Convent women in the kitchen, Ruby men replicate what they have originally condemned: the disallowing of life.

To counteract Ruby elitists' age regression, the narrator recovers the forgotten testimonies that were symptomatic of pathological intolerance. Lone becomes the alternative transmitter of narratives and acts like a reporter for the external narrator. She is the outsider who does not conform to Ruby's degenerative exclusion and suspicion of outsiders, because she does not belong genetically and morally. She is one of the two snatched up toddlers (Morrison 1998b, 189) and the rejected midwife who celebrates connections and ultimately knows the cause of Ruby's reductive aging (Morrison 1998b, 195). Also, she is a witness because "for more than twenty years Lone had watched them. Back and forth, back and forth: crying women, staring women, scowling, lip-biting women or women just plain lost" (Morrison 1998b, 270). Above all, Lone not only witnesses Ruby's establishment but also overhears the nine men's hideous plan of attack on the Convent. Lone's report displays credibility and integrity. Lone presents intact memory symptomatic of her sustainable aging.

Yet she did know something more profound than Morgan memory or Pat Best's history book. She knew what neither memory nor history can say or record: the 'trick' of life and its 'reason'. (Morrison 1998b, 272)

Lone becomes not only a midwife and transmitter of Ruby's narrative, but also a composer. She could change the course of reductive narration:

He wanted her to hear the men gathered at the Oven to decide and figure out how to run the Convent women off, and if He wanted her to witness that, He must also want her *to do something about it* [emphasis mine]. (Morrison 1998b, 274)

Thus, the narrator's fictional site exercises sustainable aging that reclaims Haven's intact memory and inclusive osmosis by remembering women's effaced interpretations in Ruby's aging narrative.

Architecturally speaking, the oral tales in *Paradise* are presented as counter narratives to Ruby's aging narrative. In "Unspeakable Things Unspoken", Morrison observes that her novels' "indeterminate ending ... follows from the untrustworthy beginning" (Morrison 1990, 31). This correlation applies to *Paradise* as the narrator discontinues the pathological aging of Ruby's narrative, through suspension, multiplicity, and open-endedness and transforms Ruby's narrative into an elusive, circadian, and indeterminate property of the community. The multiplicity of voices and the reclamation of the repressed female voices, such as Lone's, activate mental exercise in reading the reductive narrative of the attack that even Reverend Misner fails to decipher:

Pat gave him the two editions of the official story: One, that nine men had gone to talk to and persuade the Convent women to leave or mend their ways; there had been a fight; the women took other shapes and disappeared into thin air. And two (the Fleetwood-Jury version), that five men had gone to evict the women; that four others—the authors—had gone to restrain or stop them; these four were attacked by the women but had succeeded in driving them out, and they took off in their Cadillac; but unfortunately, some of the five had lost their heads and killed the old woman Richard didn't believe either of the stories rapidly becoming gospel, and spoke to Simon Cary and Senior Pulliam, who clarified other parts of the tale. But because neither had decided on the meaning of the ending and, therefore, had not been able to formulate a credible, sermonizable account of it, they could not assuage Richard's satisfaction. It was Lone who provided him with the livid details that several people were quick to discredit, because Lone, they said, was not reliable. (Morrison 1998b, 296-97)

In *Paradise*, Ruby's women defy their collective pathological aging by activating circadian memory of sustainability and imagination of renewal. Ruby men have marginalized and excluded their women from the Oven and confined them to closely-guarded spaces. Dovey's garden lacks any signs of biodiversity, such

as lively butterflies. However, Dovey's imaginative conversation with the walking man activates an architecture of biomimicry and connectivity that makes her realize her sustainable aging:

'I saw some butterflies a while back. Up there'. Dovey pointed. 'Orangy red, they were. Just as bright. Never saw that color before. Like what we used to call coral when I was a girl. Pumpkin color, but stronger'. ... She never saw the persimmon wings again Thing was, when he came, she talked nonsense. Things she didn't know were on her mind. Pleasures, worries, things unrelated to the world's serious issues. Yet he listened intently to whatever she said. (Morrison 1998b, 91, 92)

The "kitchen of the biggest house in Ruby" (Morrison 1998b, 100), Soane's kitchen, represents another confinement. In this place, Soane processes her repressed biophilic thoughts and dreams about connectivity and regeneration. Thus, she feels affinity with hunted birds: "Look out, quail. Deek's gunning for you. And when he comes back he'll throw a sackful of you on my clean floor and say something like: 'This ought to take care of supper'. Proud. Like he's giving me a present. Like you were plucked, cleaned and cooked" (Morrison 1998b, 100). The scene where Soane is standing at the clothesline and struggling with the wind to pin sheets also reflects her shift into connectivity:

Soane had looked up to see a lady in the yard smiling When the lady waved, Soane returned the stranger's greeting as best she could with a mouthful of clothespins—a nod she hoped was polite. The lady turned and moved on. Soane noticed two things: the basket was empty but the lady carried it with two hands as though it were full, which, as she knew now, was a sign of what was to come—an emptiness that would weigh her down, an absence too heavy to carry. And she knew who sent the lady to tell her so. (Morrison 1998b, 102)

Hindered by unfastened sheets and a "mouthful of clothespins", Soane cannot talk or wave back to the mystic lady's gesture. This scene is symbolic of Soane's revival of complete memory and realization of her restrictive domesticity.

She identifies the paradox of the basket's burdensome emptiness with her life as a Ruby woman. She also discerns the repressive domesticity in her embroidery, as it becomes a wordless expression of emptiness and signifies containment. Soane works "thread like a prisoner: daily, methodically, for free, producing more lace than could ever be practical" (Morrison 1998b, 53). The lace that Soane weaves signifies emptiness through the openwork pattern that characterizes its fabric. Soane's lace also conforms to Ruby women's restriction via marriage as she uses it for veiling brides, such as Dovey and Arnette, and drawing the seams for wedding gowns (Morrison 1998b, 81, 148-49). Soane now ages to recall that her methodical sewing of lace lacks any imaginative subversion of pathological development.

Unlike Ruby's architecture, the Convent features openness and biodiversity. The Convent does not have definite frontiers. In Ruby, a woman's passing into the outside world intensifies stigmatization, as in Billie Delia's case (Morrison 1998b, 203). Instead, the Convent is the "the one place [its residents] were free to leave" and each of the Convent women asks to

linger a few days but never actually leav[es]. Now and then one or another packed a scruffy little bag, said goodbye and seemed to disappear for a while—but only a while. (Morrison 1998b, 262, 222)

And unlike the exclusive and "racial house" (Morrison 1998a, 4) of Ruby, the Convent is an inclusive and "open house" (Krumholz 2002, 23) where "race-blind" (Whitton 1999) women convene. And these women "miraculously speak no racial discourse of each other *at all*" (Wilt 2001, 282).⁴

The residents of the Convent realize and design their architectural theme of sustainable aging. Originally, the Convent women have been afflicted with the pathology of impaired memory. Each of the other long-term residents—Mavis, Grace, Seneca, and Pallas—comes upon the Convent in the process of fleeing a haunting aspect of her past. The Convent women's internal fear as highlighted in Consolata's (or Connie's) answer to Mavis's question: "'You all ain't scared

4 In her interview with Paul Gray, Morrison explains how her narrative intentionally undermines any certainty of these women's color: "I did that on purpose I wanted the readers to wonder about the race of those girls until those readers understood that their race didn't matter. I want to dissuade people from reading literature in that way Race is the least reliable information you can have about someone. It's real information, but it tells you next to nothing" (par. 21).

out here by yourselves? Don't seem like there's nothing for miles outside'. Connie laughed. 'Scary things not always outside. Most scary things is inside'" (Morrison 1998b, 39). However, they start to realize regeneration through what Nancy Chodorow calls the healthy and crucial relation of "primary intimacy and merging" (Chodorow 1978, 79) that "ensures the production of feminine personalities founded on relation and connection, with flexible rather than rigid ego boundaries" (Chodorow 1974, 58). Simulating the open structure of the Convent, the women share their memories:

This is how loud dreaming began. How the stories rose in that place. Half-tales and the never-dreamed escaped from their lips to soar high above guttering candles, shifting dust from crates and bottles. And it was never important to know who said the dream or whether it had meaning. In spite of or because their bodies ache, they step easily into the dreamer's tale. (Morrison 1998b, 264)

This conversation simulates what Morrison calls, rememory that brings about "uncontrolled remembering and reliving of emotionally painful experiences" (Bouson 2000, 135) and past traumas. The Convent women's ritual of rememory exposes the possibility of their transformation through confronting, recreating, sharing the traumas of their past, and making connections between their stories. This collective articulation of their traumas teaches the Convent women to recognize and love the unity or connection between them:

In loud dreaming, monologue is no different from a shriek; accusations directed to the dead and long gone are undone by murmurs of love. So, exhausted and enraged, they rise and go to their beds vowing never to submit to that again but knowing full well they will. And they do. (Morrison 1998b, 264)

After this ritual, the Convent women reach a significant stage of aging and initiation into sobriety that is discernable in their sudden "little change" into "social and connecting" women (Morrison 1998b, 265). This sudden change reflects their progressive and sustainable aging that counters the reductive age of Ruby: "unlike some people in Ruby, the Convent women were no longer haunted" (Morrison 1998b, 266).

To conclude, *Paradise* proposes aging as an architect of varied geographies and narratives. Aging in *Paradise* invites us to rethink everything associated with the body as it is extended into a blueprint of habitats and environments that narrativize either rupture or continuity. In other words, aging in Morrison's narrative transcends histories and contexts to imagine the "New Aging [that] will inspire you and your loved ones to live smarter today so you can live better tomorrow" (Hollwich 2016).

Works Cited

- Barber, Benjamin R. 1995. "Participatory Democracy." In *The Encyclopedia of Democracy*, edited by Seymour Martin Lipset, 921-24. London: Routledge.
- Bouson, J. Brooks. 2000. *Quiet As It's Kept: Shame, Trauma, and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison*. Albany: SUNY University Press.
- Chodorow, Nancy. 1974. "Family Structure and Feminine Personality." In *Women, Culture and Society*, edited by Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere, 57-58. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Chodorow, Nancy. 1978. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Chroninger, Betty J. 2005. *From Strange Fruit to Fruitful Kitchens: The Space of the Kitchen in Toni Morrison's Novels*. Diss. Florida: University of South Florida Press.
- Cornier, Magali. 2002. "Re-Imagining Agency: Toni Morrison's *Paradise*." *African American Review* 36, no. 4: 643-61.
- Croutier, Alev Lytle. 1989. *Harem: The World Behind the Veil*. New York: Abbeville Press.
- Fraile-Marcos, Ana María. 2003. "'Hybridizing the 'City upon a Hill' in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*." *MELUS* 28, no. 4: 3-33.
- Gauthier, Marni. 2005. "The Other Side of Paradise: Toni Morrison's (Un)Making of Mythic History." *African American Review* 39, no. 3: 395-414.
- Gray, Paul. 1998. "Paradise Found." *Time* 151.1(1998). 19 Jan. 1998. 1 May 2006 <<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,987690,00.html>>.
- Guinier, Lani. 1998. *Lift Every Voice*. New York: Simon.

- Hollwich, Matthias. 2016. *New Aging: Live Smarter Now to Live Better Forever*. New York: Penguin Random House.
- Kamwangamalu, N. M. 2003. "Social Change and Language Shift: South Africa." *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 23: 225-42.
- Krumholz, Linda J. 2002. "Reading and Insight in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*." *African American Review* 36, no. 1: 21-34.
- Mernissi, Fatima. 1987. *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Morrison, Toni. 1998a. "Home." In *The House that Race Built*, edited by Wahneema Lubiano, 3-12. New York: Vintage Books.
- Morrison, Toni. 1998b. *Paradise*. New York: Knopf.
- Morrison, Toni. 1993. "Nobel Lecture." The Official Web Site of The Nobel Foundation. 7 December 1993. 13 June 2006 <http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1993/morrison-lecture.html>.
- Morrison, Toni. 1993. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Morrison, Toni. 1990. "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: the Afro-American Presence in American Literature." In *Modern Critical Views: Toni Morrison*, edited by Harold Bloom, 201-30. New York: Chelsea House.
- Read, Andrew. 2005. "'As If Word Magic Had Anything to Do with the Courage It Took to Be a Man': Black Masculinity in Toni Morrison's *Paradise*." *African American Review* 39, no. 4: 527-40.
- Said, Edward. 1983. *The Word, the Text and the Critic*. Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Tally, Justine. 1999. *Reconsidering Paradise: Toni Morrison's (H)istories and Truths*. Hamburg: Lit Verlag.
- Weinstein, Philip. 1996. *What Else But Love? The Ordeal of Race in Faulkner and Morrison*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Whitton, Natasha. 1999. "Review of *Paradise*." 20 Aug. 1999. 11 Nov. 2003 <<http://www.womenwriters.net/bookreviews/whitton2.htm>>.
- Wilt, Judith. 2001. "'Down Here in Paradise': Toni Morrison's Americas." In *The Puritan Origins of American Sex: Religion, Sexuality, and National Identity in American Literature*, edited by Tracy Fessenden, Nicholas F. Radel, and Magdalena J. Zaborowska, 273-92. New York: Routledge.