Chapter 5

The Metaphors evoking the Ancestral

The ancestor figures in Toni Morrison’s novels are strengthened in their impact by the fictional context provided by their creator, a fictional context that is constructed by presence of metaphors evoking the ancestral. Much of Morrison’s narrative space is invoked and endured by the absence of power – to name oneself, of self-determination, of a family of one’s own, of a home and a homeland and above all the absence of a language, the power to articulate. The action of the novels incorporates these historical conditions and draws attention to their many consequences. Hence the primary function of the metaphors in her narrative space is to evoke a sense of self in a cultural context, which emerges from experiences of exploitation, marginalisation, and denial – where the presence of the ancestral transforms absence into a powerful presence. The metaphors evoking the ancestral take note of the journey back in time and space where journey back in time travels indefinite stages from the self to the family, to the community across the factors of dislocation such as migration, ‘inner city life – county life’ divide, across the Middle Passage to the evocation of Africa as both a physical space and a spiritual existence. For the Africans and consequently for the African Americans, the self, the community, and the ancestor extended right to the existence of the ancestor as spirit even after death. The African world-view in respect of time is not linear but circular which implies the presence across time and space of the ancestral.

Morrison’s narrative probes the central conflict in the novels between the characters’ relationship to their natal communities, the people who gave
them life and the process of repeated creations of new social identities – like
the ‘new man’, the ‘New Negro’ who is available to his own imagination of
himself; the thing about them is that they make themselves and do their own
defining for themselves. Her novels present two distinct worlds – the
community and the home. These are the two strong metaphors, which evoke
the sense of the ancestral by manifesting the ‘village values’, and the depiction
that dissociation from such values of ‘neighbourhood’ or community might
lead to an acute loneliness and emotional aridity, i.e., dissociation from one’s
being. The African Americans, once slaves, ex-slaves and their next
generation are homeless people, physically dislocated from ‘home’.
Instructively, Morrison describes their geographical location in terms that
mirror their inner boundary confusions and psychological enclosure. The
representation of boundary is amplified on the collective level in Morrison’s
characterization of the terms within and against which a black community
defines itself. In each of her narratives, a community functions as a moral
arbiter, the source of both individual and group norms. Her characters are
defined in part through their acceptance of or challenge to certain collective
presumptions. Conversely, as a kind of collective conscience, the community
either includes or excludes its members on the basis of their accordance with
its implicit – though frequently contradictory values. Thus, separation and
division are not only psychological process but also often social ones. That is
why we are first introduced in these novels to the place that the characters
inhabit, the land of the community. Like the ancestral African tradition, place
is as important as the human who inhabit it, for the land is a participant in the
maintenance of the folk tradition.
Migration from the rural South to a more or less urban North and vice versa, has had a great impact on the lives of Afro-Americans. The effect of such migration on the characters of the novel is a major thematic consideration. Pauline Breedlove, Pecola’s mother, is representative of the loss of a center with which these migrants are infected. Separated from the rural South, cut off from the tradition of her maternal ancestors, she falls prey to the destructive ideas of physical beauty and romantic love as measures of self-worth. In *The Bluest Eye*, the community is the backdrop to the lives of the Breedloves. Pecola and Pauline are not only cut off from the community but are also homeless – an abandoned store becomes ‘house’ for Pecola which is metaphorically in contrast to the idea of a ‘warm, secure and comfortable home’ as depicted in the school primer text. Morrison’s picturization of the school primer text ‘home’ where the children are happy and secure initiates the idea that the severe harm of Pecola Breedlove erupts from, within her house and family. Her ultimate destruction comes from within rather than without. Though Morrison’s Pecola fatefully returns to her own family, in the due course of the narrative, she remains essentially outdoors – outside the boundaries of community – for the remainder of her tragic life.

The struggle between the natural order, which involves funk and passion, and the desire for the achieved warmth, security and sweetness is embodied in the house metaphors that Morrison presents. From the ugly storefront of the Breedloves to the standardized house of the Dick and Jane primer, the houses in this novel reflect the worth of their inhabitants according to the norms of the society and emphasize the destructiveness of a hierarchal order. Like the concept of physical beauty, the appearances of the house...
outward appearance rather than the inner qualities becomes the measuring stick, which threatens the inhabitants' self-worth. So the Breedloves fight and destroy each other in their ugly storefront because they come to believe in their own ugliness, their intrinsic unworthiness. The natural relationship they share as a family is distorted until the mother denies her own daughter for the 'white-girl-doll' who is her employer; the father finally rapes his own daughter in his search for love, and the daughter negates her own existence by pursuing and eventually obtaining the bluest eyes.

In *Sula*, the community of the Bottom is not only a place but also an ancestral presence – a kind of collective conscience that arbitrates the social and moral norms of its members. In evoking the ancestral presence the Bottom community functions as a life-sustaining structure for its members - it tolerates certain kinds of eccentricity, believing that magic, dreams, and inexplicable forces operate in unpredictable ways. Yet it is also punitive to those who step absolutely outside the boundaries of the communally acceptable. It is Sula who threatens and challenges the tradition of the community for she is a woman who is a rule-breaker, a kind of law-breaker, a lawless woman. Sula did the one terrible thing for black people, which were to put her grandmother in an old folk's home, which was outrageous. Dissociated from the values of 'neighbourhood' or community, she becomes dissociated from herself and is ultimately destroyed.

Like *The Bluest Eye*, there are two black communities presented in *Song of Solomon*, one in the South and the other in the North, which are contrasted though closely related. *Song of Solomon* begins with the introduction to one of these communities. Significantly, the land that this
community occupies is inseparable from that of the white community. Yet, the newly arrived blacks try to retain some of their old traditions and transform the land through the process of naming, (the street is named Not Doctor Street; the Hospital is named No Mercy Hospital) a process that keeps alive their own memories, their history as it develops. Though in the North, some try to retain their collective memories through the process of naming the land, others change their view of the land. In attempting to fulfill the promise that the North represents to them, these few would see it as an object for their use, for profit, rather than a living entity, an embodiment of their past. In their pursuit of money, they endanger the community by renting its fabric, by creating a hierarchy based on those who own things. The story of Milkman Dead is radically affected by the change in values from his Southern grandfather’s defense of his land with his life, to his northern father, who almost destroys his entire family in the pursuit of property. And Milkman’s search for gold, the profit from the land of his origins, which ironically he wants in order to free himself from the dictates of his father, underscores the difference between the old traditions and the new. But metaphorically, the ancestral land reaffirms itself, for in his search for the gold, Milkman discovers a greater treasure, his real name and his roots in the land, which ultimately enables him to fly beyond it to a greater truth. The land, then, on which the community dwells is not merely a place; it is one of the significant bases of its value system. The conflict between these different interpretations is again depicted through the house metaphor, Macon’s and Pilate’s. Milkman’s first visit to Pilate’s house initiates his journey into the ancestral land, into the legacy: in the wine house of this lady who had one earring, no navel and looked like a tall tree; amid the
pervading odor of fermenting fruit and pine, Milkman is reborn. Pilate and her house, in sharp contrast to his father’s house of death, brings a promise – suggests the possibility of flight. Pilate’s house evokes the ancestral for it is the seed bed of cultural activity – she sings about/of the forgotten lives in her attempt to recollect, reconstruct and retrieve, if necessary ‘bone by bone’, the ancestral values, which must be saved from oblivion. Symbolically, it is for Milkman the threshold – for the true legacy that Milkman will acknowledge only in his life is sharply contrasted with the heritage his father has shaped for him. Significantly, Milkman will waver in his quest between the world his father wants him to build – urging him on a straight path that ultimately will prove a dead end – and the sinuous line that the women, mostly his aunt, invite him to follow, a path that will take him on the journey back, the journey to home.

In Tar baby Morrison contrasts the Street household with Eloes, Florida, Son’s all-black hometown, the community, which represents the village values. Sydney and Ondine are Valerian’s and Margaret’s trustworthy black servants of many years. Their entire lives are spent ministering to the Street’s needs in exchange for which they not only have a steady job but also the opportunity through him to educate and spoil their orphaned niece, Jadine. Both Ondine and Sydney label themselves as Philadelphia Negroes and willingly keep away from the black community in their effort to prove themselves as different from the rest of the blacks in that Caribbean island. Sydney and Ondine refuse to acknowledge the humanity of Gideon and Therese by refusing even to know their names. Though the Street household servants believe that the white master and his house are under their sole
control but in actuality they are controlled by the white master's whims. Their	niece, Jadine rejects her African past and her ancestral mothers. Into this
clean, cool and civilized house comes Son, the Swamp Nigger. Born and
raised in Eloe, a black village in Florida, he treasures fraternity (village
values) above material profit, living alone, making it. The sudden presence of
Son in the Big House exposes the illusions of relationships that Valerian,
Margaret, Sydney, Ondine and especially Jadine have woven. The most
critical conflict in the novel, however, is between the values of the
individualistic, materialistic Jadine and the roots- bound Son as these two
respond to something deep inside each other. Son loves Eloe, his black village
where there is hardly electricity but much love, care and a sense of belonging
to ones tradition. But Eloe restricts Jadine as a person and a woman. Her
dreams there becomes nightmares filled with women – her mother, Ondine,
the African woman in yellow – who upbraids her and make her feel obscene.
But finally, both fail to ‘pass on’ the values to the other and, Son and Jadine
ultimately cling to their separate systems of values. Jadine flees back to Paris
where she feels she is safe and Therese, the ancestral guide will not let Son
succumb to the tar baby.

Beloved offers the vision of an exemplary model home in its depiction
of Sweet Home and 124 Bluestone – a critique of a system that destroys the
domestic ideal and is built on the rough pillars of slavery. Mr. Garner, the
master of Sweet Home is a man of humanity who allows his slaves to be
‘men’: to make decisions, to use guns, and, in Halle’s case, to buy his
mother’s freedom. Garner’s plantation in Beloved is the sweet home where
there are no beatings, food is plentiful, and freedom of judgment and action
are not only allowed but encouraged. Mrs. Garner works hard, humming alongside the quiet Baby Suggs without complaint. Sweet Home – before the arrival of schoolteacher – is every slave’s dream of how that intolerable condition can be made tolerable. Women are not raped; men are not beaten like mules and Garner is willing to allow slaves to hire their time and purchase their families and themselves. But his death, however, ironically reveals the fragility of the male slave’s domains – especially those dependent upon the benevolence of a master. The limits of their domain and the degree to which they had been isolated in Mr. Garner’s wonderful home become clear under schoolteacher.

Under Baby Suggs’ domain, 124 Bluestone becomes a “home” in which “strangers rested, messages were left, for whoever needed them was sure to stop by” (Beloved, 86-87) Under Baby Suggs, 124 was able to become known as “a way station”. Rather than trying to shut itself off in the privacy of her family, this remodeled lively house with a life-giving kitchen at its heart creates a communal domain. Simultaneously, this center gives Baby Suggs the kind of power that allows her to lay down the rules. Her home and kitchen metaphorically signify the ancestral African community kitchen where foods were cooked in a community oven within a gathering. Hence her home functions as a place of shelter for the large society as well as an expression of their communal power. Significantly, despite its northern locale and the efforts of Baby Suggs, 124 Bluestone is haunted as much by the institution of slavery as by the ghost named Beloved. The cause behind this can be traced in the scene of the picnic that results in the split of the community. Baby Suggs, who, in her joy at having at least part of her family with her, shares her
happiness with everyone else by having the party. But instead of looking at themselves and their gluttony, they project their anger on to Baby Suggs. That's when the community becomes envious of what she is able to do. The community that feasted on Baby Suggs' bounty really turn on them, turns them in “within the house” no longer ‘home’. And that's nothing but the result of pain, unmitigated envy: it was their refusal to warn Baby Suggs and her family of the danger coming their way, that deliberate nonaction that caused the tragedy for everyone.

In *Jazz* Morrison focuses on the black migration from the rural South to Northern cities. Morrison’s depiction of the rural South in the Post Reconstruction period is tainted with shame and trauma – as Joe and Violet are mother-and-shame-haunted persons. Joe assumes Wild to be his mother who had left without ever touching the baby she birthed; Violet’s mother Rose Dear jumps into the well without ever giving a thought about her child. Having left Vesper County, Virginia in 1906, aboard a train called the Southern Sky heading North, Joe and Violet hoped to leave behind past disappointments and dispossession and begin a new, brighter life. In Morrison’s narrative, if the city is a locus of black pride, hope and power, it also is a place of black shame and fear. Violet reckons with her mother’s suicide and what it meant to be raised without a mother; Joe mediates on his unsuccessful attempts to have Wild acknowledge him as her son; Dorcas sifts through the traumatic memories of her father’s and mother’s death; Alice faces the intensity of her repressed feelings about her husband’s infidelity over thirty years ago. Nearly twenty years later the Traces’ home on Lenox Avenue remains silent and lifeless as the middle-aged Joe and Violet are still together
but are scarcely talking to each other. Within the Trace household, Violet’s mother-hunger drives her to buy a doll, which she hides under her bed or takes out in secret or sleeps with in her arms, and, Joe has shot Dorcas, a young girl enough to be his own daughter, and spends the winter and spring visibly crying at the window or on the stoop of his Lenox Avenue apartment. Both Joe and Violet yearn for some kind of connection with their previous selves (rural South selves) in order to deal with the trauma brought on by migration and urban life. This urgency to make some kind of connection comes from Felice when she comes to the Trace’s apartment to get some help in recovering the opal ring of her mother that she had lent to Dorcas; this passing encounter turns into a promising relationship as they reconstitute the black family: Felice gains surrogate parents in Joe and Violet, whom she can talk to and learn from; Violet gets a surrogate daughter to receive some kind of her hard-earned wisdom and affection; Joe is reborn as father and lover, able to leave behind his unbearable sadness when Felice passes on Dorcas’s dying words, words which provide Joe with the sign of loving affirmation he sought but never received from the elusive Wild.

Morrison’s complex and artistic novel Paradise, projects three different communities that hold three different value systems. It’s set in three different places. First is Haven, the Old father’s city, founded in 1809, when they remove themselves from the larger society with its traumatizing categories of difference only to forge their own system of inclusion and exclusion which they pass down to their Ruby descendants. Yet the 8-rock politics of separatism also creates a strong sense of group identity, cultural belonging, and moral purpose in the people of Haven. Maintaining a sense of
communal togetherness, the people of Haven live a life of sharing and are vigilant to each other’s needs. Ruby shows how the deep seated rage (caused by shame and trauma) and reactive pride of the Old Fathers of Haven became a lethal inheritance passed down to following generations of 8-rock people, who in turn reject and shame light-skinned people. They create a separatist community to revive the dream of their ancestors but fail to evoke the ancestral knowledge of a ‘sense of communal togetherness’; hence they view the Convent as a threat to their pure 8-rock communal life. The Convent houses different values and verges on magic that is non-institutional religion and the conservative black community of the 8-rock people are affronted and horrified by that. Ruby refuses to deal with the changing times and as Morrison has pointed out that, infact, ‘that was necessary requirement for the destruction of their paradise’ (1).

In general Morrison’s characters adhere to many folk beliefs, superstitions, and signs common to historical communities. Her narrative art expresses itself in a cluster of metaphors and imagery where behaviour, philosophy, art, and language unite as a cultural expression within African and African-American tradition. Her primary novelistic agenda, as a black woman-artist is to reflect African American community – the cultural ways of knowing as well as ways of transforming that knowledge. Karla F. C. Holloway states:

It is through the ancient spirituality of this (African-American) literature that the unity of soul and gender is not challenged but is recovered and celebrated. Within this spirituality, the recovered metaphor that articulates the relationship between soul and gender is the metaphor of the goddess/ancestor. (2)
Morrison’s work focuses on the recovery of an ancestral figure, and she quite often uses this figuration as an enabling metaphor in her literary revisioning of cultural mythologies, as well as cultural (re)memberance of African spirituality, the spiritual or ancestral place, and the ancestral presence. As stated by Holloway, “Women’s voices in the community collect, articulate, and culturally reconstruct myth. They are the “act” of language that Toni Cade Bambara calls “spiritual force… Energizers.” (3)

Some of Morrison’s women characters function as culture bearer as they tie black people to each other in caring and sharing ways, thus resisting the dissolution of cultural continuity. Though they exist in a world of fragmentation, they effectively transmit the more sustaining black culture to those who break themselves away from the bonds of cultural continuity. Morrison suggests that the vibrancy of the folk culture resists through the fortunes and misfortunes of these women characters and it serves to bind themselves into kinship with each other. From folk to the blues, from folk speech to myths and other beliefs, these women, share with historical black folk communities patterns of survival and coping, traditions that comfort in times of loss, and beliefs that point to an enduring creativity. Morrison depicts the life of these women characters in the stark warrior sense. They are women as roots – who evoke the sense of the ancestral, who bridge past and present, living and dead, memory and meaning, place and culture, who were able to “pass it on”. Some such women are M’Dear (The Bluest Eye), Eva Peace (Sula), Pilate (Song of Solomon), Therese (Tar Baby), Baby Suggs (Beloved), True Bell (Jazz), Consolata (Paradise). M’Dear is reminiscent of historical folk communities. She is a local healer, a conjurer, or ‘hoodoo doctor’.
Though she is very, very old’, she is neither hunched nor she stoops, instead she stands tall with all her power and the faith of the community in her. Though an outsider she has the nurturing ability – to hold things together, that sustains the folk culture within the community (as depicted in the character of Claudia and the Mac Tear family) against the dissolution represented by Pauline’s refusal to mother her children, Geraldine’s distortion of the notion of family, and Cholly’s destructive abuse of his daughter.

As portrayals of black women, Eva is a complex and non-stereotypical figure. Only such ancestral vitality and complexity could have produced Eva – as indefinable as she is black, as unique as she is a woman. Eva is arrogant, independent, decidedly very strong in her love and hatreds; she is a warrior, strong by virtue of her will, wit and idiosyncrasies rather than because of her physic. That strength is nurtured and sustained by her hatred for Big Boy, the unfaithful lover and father of her three children, a hatred that she says keeps her alive and happy. She loved her children enough to stay alive and keep them alive; though she needn’t be physically endearing to them. Thus, she retreats to her upstairs bedroom where she spends most of her time, but from where she directs the lives of her children, friends, strays, and a constant stream of boarders. As a mother she has given life, and so when her son, Plum returns from the war and attempts to crawl back into her womb, she acts in her usual decisive manner, she burns him to death. If Eva has got any of the traditional qualities it is that of endurance as she outlives all three of her children as well as her sole grandchild, Sula, through pain and suffering. Like the primeval Esu, the ancestral spirit, feared and worshiped by black people,
Eva too controls and is feared by her children, friends, strays, the boarders and visitors; Eva both gives life and takes it away.

Pilate is a natural healer, skilled wine-maker, singer, conjurer woman and soothsayer, truth giver, and this bears witness to the extent of the legacy of black womankind. Yet while the narrative insists on Pilate’s folk pride, it also presents the navelless Pilate as a stigmatized individual. On learning of her defect “Men frowned, women whispered and shoved their children behind them” (Song of Solomon, 149). During her early life as a wonderer, Pilate takes up with several groups of migrant firm workers only to have one group ask her to leave when they discover she lacks a navel and another to expel her by leaving her behind. As Pilate comes to realize,

Although men fucked armless women, one-legged women, hunchbacks and blind women, drunken women, razor-toting women, midgets, small children, convicts, boys, sheep, dog, goats, liver, each other, and even certain species of plants, they were terrified of fucking her - a woman with no navel. (Song of Solomon, 148).

To Macon, who has internalized white constructions of black racial inferiority, Pilate is the stigmatized, racially degenerate Other: marked by the stain of racial and class shame, she is inferior, defective, dirty and dissmelling. After the birth of Milkman, Pilate visits her brother's family only to have Macon eventually tell her to leave his house and not return until she shows some respect for herself. Abandoned by her brother and lovers, shunned by neighbours, she overcomes adversity and rejection without recrimination or self-pity. Resourceful and independent, she scorns ‘civilized creatures’ comforts, ekes out a satisfying life for herself, Reba and Hagar, and protects herself and those she cares for in times of crisis. Ignoring the pain and powerlessness of the social outcasts’ situation, the stigmatized, ostracized
Pilate refuses to take offence at the way others have treated her and these experiences finally liberate and empower her. The absence of a navel isolates her, ensuring both fear and respect, but it also brings her close to the flying ancestor. It sets her free from conventional relationships, free to define the values according to which she will live, to design a life of her own, and to interpret on her own terms and unequivocally the particular legacy of her people. Described as a “natural healer” (Song of Solomon, 150) and as a person who values human-and family-connections above all else, Pilate becomes the site in the text of redemptive folk values.

Therese is a complex and passionate woman. Insulted and treated as an inferior by the black/white members of the Street household, who do not even bother to learn her name. She is the stigmatized outsider. Therese is the root-bound myth teller who accepts Son as one of the mythical horseman who rode their horses in the Isle Chevalier. Therese is the first to detect Son’s presence on the island, and she not only feeds her “chocolate eater” but also creates his identity. Son, who seems to be stuck to the tar baby, Jadine, is given a choice by Therese, who urges him to free himself from Jadine and join the blind horsemen who are waiting for him. The argument Therese uses to convince Son that he should give up the search for Jadine echoes her role as the ‘culture bearing’ black woman. Despite her pain, suffering and traumatisation at the hands of white/black African-Americans, she still is the nurturing woman of Morrison, who represents according to her, the ability to hold things together. Hence the folk voice of Therese tells Son- “Forget her. There is nothing in her parts for you. She has forgotten her ancient properties” (Tar Baby, 305). Tar Baby is the story about nourishment – the devastation caused by its lack and
the regenerative power of its presence. It is the story of a man in search of nourishment and of a woman whose nourishing power, cut off from its source, has been defused. It is the story of a world where pretensions wars with authenticity and where people who live in that world must choose, for there are guides. There are women as guides, the woman of the “burnt eyelashes” and Therese and the women of Eloè. These women, by allusion, figure the warrior women, the queen women, the life bearing, culture-bearing women of their own ancient origins. In their songs, their tales, their references, these women acknowledge the women of other culture whose paradigms they either approve or reject. Morrison finds a counterpart in Therese as she is the woman who knew their true and ancient properties. Morrison’s authorial presence stands behind Therese’s defense of ancient maternal properties, the loss of which convicts Jadine. Hence, Therese the myth-teller will not allow son to succumb to the tar baby. She takes him to the back of the Island where the horsemen still ride blind and seeing.

Having given up seven of her eight children to slavery, Baby Suggs knows what it means to have to put the heart back together after it has been torn apart. As a holy woman, a hope bringer True Belle, a larger than life Pilate, a visionary Consolata, an unselfish Eva, a healer M’Dear, Baby Suggs uses her heart to become the heart of the community. Baby Suggs, whose years as a slave “busted her legs, back, head, eyes, hands, kidneys, womb and tongue”, (Beloved, 87) is forced to have eight children by six fathers. Despite the fact that as a slave Baby Suggs lived a life of shame and trauma, she converts herself as the healing and wise ancestor who teaches the ex-slaves to replace shame with pride, to love their black flesh, flesh that is despised by
white man. In her calling, in the Clearing, Baby Suggs upholds the power of folk imagination that has clearly served a constructive purpose for her and the entire community along Bluestone Rood. As a medium who gives voice to unvoiced sentiments, Baby Suggs, articulates what many people cannot. She is therefore participant and observer, the subject and the object of creativity. Transplanted by slavery, to the soil of Cincinnati, Ohio, and also in the northward progression typical of blacks (slaves and ex-slaves), Baby Suggs is the archetype for leadership among those sometimes drifting masses. Her role in the community, therefore, make her larger than life. She becomes hope bringer and visionary, suggesting to her neighbours that the possibilities on the northern side of the Ohio River may indeed be realized.

True Belle is the slave-woman who is armed with the power of endurance. A slave of Vera Louise, she had to leave for Virginia along with her mistress who had been ostracized by her parents when they come to know that Vera, their daughter is pregnant by a black man. True Belle leaves her family and children behind with a hope that one day she will buy her freedom from her mistress in exchange of her hard work. Cut off from her daughter and husband, she raises up the baby of her mistress and buys back her freedom with years of loyal service. By the time she returns to her child, Rose Dear now the mother of Violet is abandoned by her husband. She is the ‘competent’ woman who comes to take care of the family, and who stitches by firelight and gardens and harvests during the day. Despite the comforting presence of Rose’s mother, True Belle-Rose Dear commits suicide four years after True Belle’s arrival by jumping down a well. The split between woman as the passive self-sacrificing victim Rose Dear, Dorcas and the ‘competent’ able to
endure as a result of being traumatized, True Belle, is projected in these women's contested tales and experiences that they have had to go through their lives. The cause of Rose Dear's suicide and the almost willful death of Dorcas is that they were unable to endure the daily humiliations and catastrophic traumas suffered by African Americans in the postbellum South. After Rose Dear's willful death, it is the grandmother True Belle, a former slave, who rescues the family from despair and teaches them the lessons of laughter and survival. She is what Morrison calls "the stark warrior" woman, who is the tribal mother in whom rests the wisdom of the race, the saviour figure who propels Violet to Palestine where she meets Joe and acquires inner strength and confidence. Consolata - a woman tormented by feelings of debilitating self-contempt ultimately becomes the spiritual guide of the women who are running away from all sorts of trauma, and who gather in a former convent to heal their broken lives. Connie - Consolata spends many years as the devoted servant of Mary Magna, who rescued her when she was nine years old. Consolata was molested when she was nine and remains celibate for thirty years till she meets Deacon, who reminds her of the black people from her home. After their affair ends and a "sunshot" sears Consolata's right eye, 'announcing the beginning of her bat vision', Consolata, begins to see "best in the dark". She has the power to raise the dead, and she uses her gift - her ability to step inside other people - to prolong the life of Mary Magna and a few more. Consolata begins to practice the African spirit worship and initiates the convent women into the occult knowledge of the ancestors, thus helping them discover the authentic and divine part of the self hidden behind the socially constructed layers of the personality. Her guardian deity or ancestral
guide, the young and seductive man, who like Consolata has green eyes and tea-coloured hair, represents the core of Consolata’s identity – the deity within or ‘beloved part of the self’ – the “unbridled authentic self” (Paradise, 177). But, to the Ruby men, the Convent women represent a danger to the community for there is an inevitable clash between Ruby’s organized religion and the unorganized magic practiced by the Convent women and Consolata becomes the innocent victim of this clash. In the final scene, the Convent women, having packed their knapsacks and said their goodbyes, head to port in the ship that carries the “lost and saved” to a distinctly earthly paradise a place where Consolata adoringly gazes at Piedade while “around them on the beach, sea trash gleams.” (Paradise, 318)

Morrison uses metaphors as a creative representation of her vision in recovering the ancestral idea and experience. She organizes her metaphors in a manner that fit in with Holloway’s scheme of analysis, as a pattern of revision, re-membrance (the bodying suggested by ‘membrance’ as well as the restorative aspect) and recursion – that organizes the relationship between meaning, voice and community. Her narrative focuses on the metaphors that suggest the ideas of birth (re-birth in literal and metaphorical sense) wholeness, spirit, community and ancestral voice. Along with ‘home’ another of Morrison’s recurring metaphors is the flying ancestor. In her novels, flying is not just a metaphorical expression of black spirituality; it is rooted in ancient belief and folklore. According to the African legends, this gift of flying was given only to those who knew the secret word. In Virginia, his family’s ancestral land, Milkman gradually assembles the diverse pieces of the puzzle of his ancestry, using the song. As he (re)members the corrupted
version of the song sung by the children around the mythical flight of
Solomon, he also restores his link with his cultural community by recovering
its history. The collective memory Milkman eventually reconstructs concerns
his great-grandfather Solomon/Shalimar; the patriarch of the family, who
“flew” back to Africa, leaving his devastated wife and twenty-one children
behind. Such stories are part of black American folklore, preserving the dream
of rising above the brutal conditions of slavery by escape to Africa, of
transcending the literal boundaries of servitude. In his ancestor’s world,
communal and mythical values prevail over individualism and materialism;
when he adopts their assumptions in place of his own, he arrives at a more
complete understanding of what his experience means. Milkman comes to
know fully who he is and can voice the words and meanings to the song Pilate
has only known partially. He now understands it as a significant action from
his ancestral past, a knowledge to reach back into history. Milkman’s leap, is
an act of faith in the legacy, an act of communion with Pilate, and with his
flying ancestors – a faith on the power of memory, collective memories kept
alive through names, stories, words and songs; on the power of music that
accompanies all the rituals of life from birth to death and through which
feelings and the totality of experience are expressed.

Unlike Milkman, Pecola in *The Bluest Eye* is represented as a
grotesque and a flightless bird: “She flailed her arms like a bird in an eternal,
grotesquely futile effort to fly. Beating the air, a winged but grounded bird,
intent on the blue void it could not reach – could not even see . . . “(*The Bluest
Eye*, 158) Pecola finds no ancestral voice within her family, where love is not
bred; nor is there any such guidance in a northern city where she has little or
no access to nature or to the wisdom of her culture. She is unable to liberate herself from the oppressive influence of white American standards, and Pecola’s tragic plight stems primarily from her inability to achieve a positive reading of blackness in an urban setting dominated by pervasive white standards. In contrast to Pecola, Son in Morrison’s *Tar Baby*, is ultimately able to take the flight to his ancestral place with the help of Therese who guides him in his flight. Therese, the myth-teller, recites the ancestral song of the blind slaves to son. These blind ones rode their horses in the Isle de la Chavelier and their descendant do not see with their eyes, but with the eye of their mind and this controls the land they live on. The native Therese believes that it is Son who is one of the mythical horsemen who has come to save the cultural orphans like Jadine, Sydney and Ondine, the latter two refusing to accept Theresa and Gideon as fellow compatriots. Hence, Therese will not allow Son to succumb to the tar-baby i.e., the oppressive influence of white American standards represented by Jadine. She takes him to the back of the island, his leap or flight to his ancestral place armed with the knowledge that blackness or tar which metaphorically binds the community is their culture, their shared history and a history of oppression which will arm them with the ability to achieve a positive reading of blackness even in an urban setting dominated by pervasive white standards so that no more Pecola can be transformed into a victimized bird. Morrison uses myth to produce the effects as described by Holloway:

Myth vitalizes language, giving it a presence outside of the interpretive mode and forcing its significance to a level where the community’s shared meanings are the basis of its understandings and interactions with both the spiritual and the physical worlds. Myth is neither of one of these worlds; it is both of them... mythologizing is a recognition and an articulation of an implicit, cultural memory.”(4)
In an act of recovery, Morrison's metaphors that evoke the sense of the remembered African past, whether be it of ancestral land or values, are the bones Pilate holds on to, the Calabash the importance of which Jadine fails to recognize, the bone buttons left in the cave once supposed to be inhabited by Wild, and the oven that the 8-roch ancestors built. These metaphors hold the essence of ancient and authentic blackness in Morrison's work that distinguish her novels from the 'greats' of the Euro-American tradition of fiction.

The bag of bones which in *Song of Solomon* Pilate carries all through her life suggests the value she attaches to the bones as symbols of an obligation to a past event and a human relationship – it matters not whether the bones she has carried to Michigan are those of her husband, as she tells the policeman; of murdered white man, as she believes; or of her father, as Milkman informs her. In the African Shona culture, bones represent not only the connection between the living and the dead, but also connection to dead ancestors, a collective remembrance of those who have died fighting for visions of a stronger, more valuable ancestral land. In carrying the bags of bones, Pilate's own impulse has been to recollect and reconstruct forgotten lives, if necessary bone-by-bone, to retrieve the lives from oblivion and neglect. In *Tar Baby*, Morrison uses the calabashes as a metaphor to highlight Jadine's willed derecognition of her traditional culture in her pursuit to manifest an Euro-American identity. This metaphor gains in meaning in the context of Morrison's counter shaming of the Euro-American who takes pride in believing that it is their sole prerogative in being civilized and hence capable of artistic expression. Valerian's associations of calabashes with the dark ages, imply ironically the existence of both civilized norms and artistic
abilities among the Africans. The metaphor undercuts the politically loaded ideological positions since the Enlightenment that argue that the Africans lack the sensibility and the creativity necessary for artistic creation. The Yuroba mythology postulates that the calabash is connected with the creation of the universe as a part of traditional creation myth in that it was related to Olodumare the primordial creator, the supreme deity, the bearer of “ase” kept in a calabash. The calabash belongs to Esu Elegbara and as such has ancestral connections evoking the idea of the distance traveled by the African Americans since the Middle Passage and the possibility in the fictional and cultural imagination of retrieval through the figure of the unchallengeable connector across time and space, Esu. The calabash metaphor both indicates and traces the spiritual, psychic and cultural disruption characterizing the contemporary African diaspora.

The idea of place, which is seminal in the African traditional worldview, and the idea of a home indicative of identity, coalesces in the metaphor of the cave as a dwelling place that we notice in *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, and *Jazz*. In *Song of Solomon*, the bag of bones, the symbol of the idea of the ancestor, originates in a cave where the brother and sister, Macon and Pilate, had killed the white man and mistakenly believe that the bones are those of that man till Milkman discloses that it actually carries the bones of his grandfather. The cave turns out to be the liminal space connecting both Milkman and Pilate to their ancestor. In *Tar Baby*, the dark room in Eloe, where Son had kept Jadine implies the cave and significantly, it is in this very enclosed space that Jadine has her encounter with the ancestral mothers. In *Jazz*, while on way to Vienna, Virginia, in search of his father to kill him,
Golden Gray encounters Wild and fascinated by her forgets his mission of vengeance and disappears with her into the woods. What Joe sees in 1906 is a cave and the unmistakable signs of domesticity and peace within (Jazz, 184). The bone buttons lying in the cave metaphorically indicates that in Jazz Morrison subverts Golden Gray’s initial attempts to preserve the coherence of his white identity by keeping at a distance from Wild. The bone button metaphor signifies Golden Gray’s acceptance of his own blackness, as years later Violet bewails her racially determined mistake about Golden Gray’s motive: not out of revenge related to skin colour does he drive to Vienna, but because of his desperate need for a father figure and for authentic being. (Jazz, 159)

Fire, in various manifestations, has been an indicator of man’s descent from the primitive ancestor, and the idea of the fire turns into two powerful metaphorical presence in Morrison’s novels: most prominently in the oven in Paradise and the kitchen in Beloved. The oven permeates the action as well as the minds of the characters in Paradise. It is the one silent witness of migration and the repeated process of community formation at different places. It is also a witness to the pride of the 8-rock community in that none of their women ever had to work in a white kitchen. Further, it is also a witness to generational conflict as represented in the tussle about the writings on the plaque, cast on it by the primary ancestor, Zechariah. The words on the oven’s mouth “Beware the Furrow of his Brow” keep on eliciting different responses over time, from the different generations of the inhabitants, from Haven to Ruby. The words memorialize the deep and enduring shame-rage felt by the Old Fathers, for the inscription was meant to be a threat to those who had
disallowed the 8-rock people of Haven in their migration in search of settlement. The younger generations of Ruby, who intend to change the words, are warned by Deacon Morgan, “You in long trouble if you think you can disrespect a row you never hoed” (Paradise, 86). The shift in African American culture is signified in the movement of the oven; that which once symbolized group identity, cultural belonging and moral purpose, which was once a vital community meeting place, has been reduced to a gathering place for Ruby’s lazy young people. Similarly in Beloved, Baby Sugg’s kitchen used to have two stoves always at work to feed the large number of people who passed by, but which again became cold as people stopped coming after the white people had come to her yard.

References:

2. Moorings & Metaphors: Figures of Culture and Gender in Black Women’s Literature, 1992, 2
3. Ibid, 34
4. Ibid, 31