



A Feminist Study of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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ABSTRACT

This research explores how Toni Morrison's *Beloved* rewrites the story of Black female identity, maternity, and resistance in the aftermath of slavery. Also, it provides an interdisciplinary feminist perspective inspired by Black feminist theory as well as classical feminist theory, especially the writings of Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Audre Lorde, Bell Hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins. Morrison questions systems of oppression. This paper is inspired by the real-life narrative of Margaret Garner, *Beloved* offers a terrible picture of the psychological and societal wounds of Black women. Through characters like Sethe, Denver, and Baby Suggs, Morrison uses non-linear storytelling, polyphonic voices, and symbolic elements, especially the ghost figure of *Beloved*, to emphasize trauma, silence, and memory as central factors for identity struggle. So, articulating how motherhood becomes a site of both vulnerability and political resistance. This paper contends that Morrison not only reveals the historical facts of slavery but also performs a literary act of recovery providing Black women's voices, agency, and healing a forum. The intersectional feminist perspective presents the novel as a radical criticism of both racial and patriarchal dominance, therefore contributing significantly to feminist literary debate.

1. Introduction

Offering a voice to those who are sometimes disregarded in both historical and literary histories, Nobel Laureate and one of the most revered characters in American literature, Toni Morrison. She has always focused on the life of African American women in her Book, *Beloved* 1987. It is among the most potent literary depictions of Black femininity and offers a great investigation of the psychological and emotional scars caused by slavery. *Beloved*, set in the aftermath of the Civil War, borrows the real-life narrative of Margaret Garner, an enslaved woman who killed her child instead of letting her be re-enslaved. Morrison fictionalizes this past to expose the terrible crimes of slavery and their echoes over several generations. The novel centers mostly on Sethe, an escaped slave and mother whose anguish from her past and the child she lost haunts her both physically and psychologically. Morrison questions the institution of slavery not simply as a means of racial exploitation but also as a profoundly gendered form of violence using Sethe's story and the lives of other female characters like Denver, Beloved, and Baby Suggs. These women's trauma lives in their bodies, in their memories, and their relationships. By doing this, Morrison subverts prevailing historical narratives that sometimes minimize or ignore the realities of enslaved women. Especially in its intersectional form, feminist theory offers a strong lens through which *Beloved* may be seen. Often neglecting how race, class, and historical context impact gendered experience, early feminist criticism concentrated mostly on the perspectives of white, middle-class women. Scholars like Bell Hooks (1981) and Patricia Hill Collins (2000) underlined, nevertheless, that the interconnections of racial and gendered oppression fundamentally shape Black women's reality. Using this intersectional feminist lens helps readers to grasp how Morrison questions not only patriarchy but also the racial hierarchy aggravating Black women's suffering. A major motif in the novel, motherhood, is shown as a complex and frequently awful experience rather than as a straightforward, natural link. The role of the mother defined enslaved women not by care and protection but by fear and loss as their children may be sold, seized, or killed. *Beloved* presents Sethe's horrific act of infanticide as a desperate assertion of mother agency in circumstances whereby Black

women had no control over their bodies or the futures of their children. Morrison forces the reader to face the psychological fallout from such a choice, therefore recovering the Black mother as a subject of rich moral and emotional depth. Based on Black women's experiences, this paper contends that *Beloved* is a radical feminist work challenging both racial and patriarchal systems of oppression. Morrison recovers a forum for Black women's voices and stories through Sethe's act of mother resistance, *Beloved's* symbolic haunting, and the strength of the female community. This study will look at how Morrison depicts trauma, motherhood, memory, and healing using intersectional feminist theory in ways that challenge dominant narratives and show the resilience and agency of Black women.

1.1 The Objective of the Study

With an eye on how Toni Morrison's *Beloved* reflects fundamental feminist issues such as motherhood, female agency, and physical independence within the framework of slavery, this study aims primarily to provide an intersectional feminist critique of It seeks to investigate, via Morrison's characters, the psychological and social effects of slavery on Black women, therefore highlighting trauma, resistance, and healing. The study also looks at Morrison's storytelling techniques, such as polyphonic voices and non-linear structure, as feminist instruments allowing voice for underprivileged realities. Black feminist theory, especially the writings of Audre Lorde, Bell Hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins, particularly helps to highlight the particular experiences of Black women sometimes disregarded in mainstream feminist discourse crucial to this study. Through reading the ghost figure *Beloved* as a metaphor for suppressed female history, the study links Black feminist viewpoints with classical feminist theory to offer a complex picture of gendered oppression and liberation in the book.

1.2 The Importance of the Study

This work is important since it emphasizes intersectionality. Whereas Morrison's work necessitates a more complex approach that considers race, gender, and class as overlapping influences, traditional feminist readings generally center on white,



middle-class experiences. Applying Black feminist theory to *Beloved*, this study highlights neglected voices and questions accepted narratives that have historically omitted or misrepresented Black women's life. It also emphasizes how important Morrison's writings are in modern feminist debate since they provide understanding of how books could both resist and record systems of injustice.

2. Literature Review

Examined through the prism of slavery, memory, and trauma, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* has been much studied with an eye toward feminism. Discovering how Morrison prioritizes the experiences of Black women who are typically excluded in both historical and literary histories has been greatly aided by feminist literary critique. Emphasizing the need of cultural distinctiveness and opposing homogenized feminist interpretations, Barbara Christian (1985) notes how Morrison's stories provide a "political statement by centering the Black female experience." Likewise, Bell Hooks (1989) says *Beloved* "foregrounds Black women's pain while refusing to romanticize it," therefore supporting Morrison's dedication to showing the facts of Black womanhood unvarnished or diluted. Another center of attention in *Beloved* research has been the intersection of trauma and narrative. Morrison's fractured narrative structure, according to Horvitz (2000), depicts the psychological fragmentation of formerly enslaved people, especially Black women whose tragedies are compounded by both racial and gendered violence. This is consistent with the research of Cathy Caruth (1996), who contends that trauma only can be accessible indirectly by narratives, memory, and repetition and disturbs linear timing. Morrison's narrative style thus becomes both a means of healing by memory and a mirror of pain. Valerie Smith (1990) reads Sethe's resistance, especially her act of infanticide, not as moral deviation but rather as a strong assertion of agency in a culture that denied her ownership over her body and children. This concept speaks to the feminist theories of Judith Butler (1990), who contends that performative resistance is a common means of agency expression from the margins of social conventions. Morrison's portrayal of Sethe's conduct might thus be interpreted as an instance of performative



rebellion against the institution of slavery, which considered Black women as the only means of labor productivity. *Beloved's* ghost figure has also been understood as a psychological forecast of Sethe's guilt, as a haunting manifestation of suppressed pain (Koolish, 2001), and as a symbol of the past that refuses to be silenced (Rushdy, 1999). But our analysis suggests a feminist rereading of *Beloved* as a metaphor for suppressed female history, one that calls attention and reintegration into collective memory. Inspired by Audre Lorde's (1984) claim that speaking out against silence is a feminist imperative and Patricia Hill Collins's (2000) idea of the "outsider within," where Black women's experiences are especially positioned to expose systematic injustices and redefine knowledge production, this interpretation draws from both. This study connects Black feminist viewpoints with traditional feminist theory, such as Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) *The Second Sex*, while earlier studies have either highlighted trauma or concentrated on narrative form. The life of Morrison's female characters reflects De Beauvoir's claim that woman is made into the "Other," but only over the lens of intersectionality, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), can one really understand the compounded injustices Black women in *Beloved* experience. This study presents a broad reading by combining various theoretical frameworks that emphasize how Morrison not only recounts enslavement but also recovers and transforms the narrative of Black female identity and struggle.

3. Black Feminist Theory

Black Feminist Theory is a critical framework that focuses on the experiences and struggles of Black women who encounter several oppressive systems, including racism, sexism, and classism. Black feminist theory, which arose as a reaction to the oppression of Black women by both white feminists and Black liberationists, places special emphasis on the fact that Black women are exclusively situated at the crossroads of many identities (Crenshaw, 1989).

Scholars and activists like Bell Hooks, Audre Lorde, Patricia Hill Collins, and subsequently Kimberlé Crenshaw, who invented the idea of intersectionality, gushed this theory into life during the 1970s and 1980s. Intersectionality helps us to

understand how systems of power interact and how people experience oppression in compounded forms. A Black woman might, for example, experience both racism and sexism in ways that neither Black males, mostly affected by racism, nor White women, mostly affected by sexism, do (Crenshaw, 1989).

Black women have a unique perspective based on their lived experiences, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) underlines, and this should be acknowledged as a legitimate source of information. Speaking about the value of self-definition, bodily autonomy, and shattering the silences enforced by white patriarchal conventions, Audre Lorde (1984) Bell Hooks (1981) questions both sexist Black activism and racist feminism, arguing that real emancipation has to consider all kinds of injustice afflicting Black women.

4. Black Feminist Views Reflected in *Beloved*

As a revolutionary novel, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* brilliantly dramatizes many of the main ideas of Black feminist theory. It examines how Black women who were formerly enslaved, especially Sethe, Denver, Baby Suggs, and Beloved, have suffered profoundly emotional, physical, and spiritual scars from their gendered experiences of enslavement. Key ideas from Black feminist philosophy as developed for *Beloved* are below.

4.1 Intersectionality: The Interlinking Oppressions of Class, Gender, and Race

Sethe's persona embodies intersectionality. She is not only a victim of slavery; she is more especially a Black woman enslaved, subjected to forced labor, sexual abuse, and reproductive exploitation. Her reputation as a mother is weaponized against her. "The schoolteacher wrapped that string all around my head and crossed my nose around my behind. My teeth count. Anything involving determining the value of a slave (Morrison, 1987, p. 228).

Reflecting Black feminist criticism of slavery as a racist patriarchal institution, this scene reveals how Sethe's body was dehumanized and commodified. Her experience is one of gendered abuse and physical domination as much as of racism.

4.2 Motherhood and Reproductive Justice as Protest

Morrison skillfully shows in *Beloved* how slavery distorted the fundamental idea of motherhood. Black enslaved women were compelled to bear children legally held by their masters. Though from a Black feminist standpoint, Sethe's choice to kill her daughter instead of let her be re-enslaved is among the most divisive ones in the book. Morrison, (1987, p. 236) states, "If I hadn't killed her, she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her."

This moment reflects the 2000 claim of Patricia Hill Collins that Black motherhood has always been both a political action and a hardship. Though sad, Sethe's actions contradict the idea that motherhood is passive or emotional; rather, it becomes an arena of survival and sacrifice in a society in which Black women do not influence the paths of their children.

4.3 The Female's Body as a Trauma and Resistance Site

The female's body is a site of both tyranny and power, Audre Lorde (1984) underlines that Sethe's back, scarred into the form of a "chokecherry tree," reminds *Beloved* of both her anguish and her fortitude "That is a tree." a tree of chokechers. Trunk, branches, even leaves (Morrison, 1987, p. 93).

This metaphor shows how Black women's bodies serve as places for trauma recording and passing on. *Beloved* herself, a ghost turned flesh, represents generational trauma and unresolved grief connected to enslavement and women. Her physical appearance captures the way the past resists being buried.

4.4 Silence, Voice, and the Value of Narrative.

Black feminist theory's fundamental concept is Black women's need to take back their stories. Sethe is tormented by her past not only in recollection but also in the guise of *Beloved*, the kid whose death she never talks of "It was not a story to pass on," (Morrison, 1987, p. 275).

Deliberately, ambiguousness is this recurring line toward the end of the book. It pushes the reader not to forget even if it implies that the experience is too terrible to recur. Black feminists such as Bell Hooks (1981) contend that healing requires

breaking silence. Characters like Sethe and Denver finally start to speak, assert their tales, and pursue new futures in *Beloved*, so embodying the politics of storytelling as emancipation.

4.5 Female Group and Community Healing

Paul D, a male character, tries to assist Sethe; yet, it is the Black women's group that helps her heal finally. At the climax of the book, they come together for an emotional and spiritual intervention meant to drive Beloved's ghost away "They arrived and they did not arrive empty-handed..." First, there were no words at all. The sound at first was "(Morrison, 1987, p. 261).

This event captures the 1984 focus of Audre Lorde on the force of female solidarity. Healing in *Beloved* comes from the communal strength of women who know each other's suffering and will not let one of their own suffer alone—not from romantic love.

Black feminist theory helps us to find the multiple meanings and politics behind Morrison's *Beloved*. Black feminist readings of Sethe expose her as a mother, a survivor, a body shaped by history, and a voice refusing to be muffled rather than as only a wounded woman. Morrison's *Beloved* demonstrates what Black feminism aims for, the emancipation and healing of Black women via the reclamation of their stories and humanity, employing intersectionality, resistance, physical reclamation, and community support.

4.6 Recovering Black Feminist Identity

By combining Black and classical feminist theory, this research presents a complex and multi-dimensional interpretation of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, therefore transcending a simple portrayal of slavery to become a literary act of reclamation. Morrison reconstructs and reclaims Black female identity, agency, and survival, not just retelling the cruelty of slavery. Conventional historical narratives have sometimes made Black women invisible, assigning them to faceless characters or passive victims within more general Black suffering. *Beloved* opposes this erasure, meanwhile, by showing Black women as fully formed, emotionally complex people molded by pain,



love, shame, resistance, and community bonds (Christian, 1985; Hooks, 1989). Applying Simone de Beauvoir's (1949) theory of the "Other", looks closely at how Black women are portrayed in *Beloved* as historically excluded individuals. Nonetheless, as many academics have pointed out, traditional feminist theory by itself cannot explain the racist aspects of gendered oppression. The study then looks to Black feminist viewpoints, especially the writings of Audre Lorde (1984), Bell Hooks (1989), and Patricia Hill Collins (2000), whose frameworks center on the particular experiences of Black women and question the universalizing tendencies of mainstream feminist discourse. Collins's "standpoint theory," for example, places Black women's lived experience as a source of epistemological strength and resistance—a concept that speaks especially to Morrison's depiction of women like Sethe and Baby Suggs, whose suffering becomes the basis for both personal and societal change.

By characterizing Sethe's actions, especially the infanticide, as acts of agency carried out in opposition to societal created norms, Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender performativity enhances the study even more. This lens encourages a reading of Sethe's actions as politically charged performances that challenge hegemonic ideas of motherhood and morality, therefore, transcending her lone traumatized mother perspective. Furthermore serving as a metaphor for suppressed and repressed female history, *Beloved's* spectral form also serves as a disturbing presence. Audre Lorde's (1984) appeal to express what has long been unheard helps one to understand her arrival into the story and transforms personal recollection into a political declaration. Moreover, Morrison's experimental narrative style, non-linear chronology, changing viewpoints, and polyphonic voices, mirror the fractured and often fragmentary character of traumatic memory (Horvitz, 2000). These narrative devices act as feminist tools, subverting established historical narratives and recovering narrative power for those usually denied it. Nevertheless, the book opposes closure even as it honors times of resistance and healing. The fact that Morrison's characters' tragedies are not entirely healed as Koolish (2001) notes implies that recovery is neither certain nor straightforward. This uncertainty supports the notion that the process of reclaiming identity under circumstances of historical trauma is continuous and

incomplete.

Morrison's *Beloved* is a potent site of feminist intervention, merging the intimate with the political, the historical with the creative. *Beloved* not only challenges systems of racial and gendered oppression, but also redefines Black femininity as a place of resistance, recollection, and redefining by combining classical and Black feminist frameworks.

5. Conclusion:

Through an intersectional feminist perspective, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* becomes a great literary masterpiece reclaiming Black female identity, agency, and history. Morrison questions the racial violence of slavery and the gender violence ingrained within it by concentrating on the lived experiences of women like Sethe, Denver, and Baby Suggs. *Beloved* passionately opposes the atrocities of the past using a radical act of storytelling, rather than just recounting them. Inspired by Black feminist writers like Audre Lorde, bell hooks, and Patricia Hill Collins as well as classical feminist thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir and Judith Butler, the book offers a rich framework for comprehending the particular kinds of oppression Black women experience and their resiliency.

Morrison's use of storytelling as a weapon of feminist opposition. *Beloved*'s ghostly form represents the suppressed voices of history, especially those of Black women enslaved whose tales were quieted. Though contentious, Sethe's act of infanticide becomes a strong statement of mother agency in a society in which Black women had little influence over the destinies of their children. Morrison conveys the fragmented yet strong Black femininity through the use of non-linear narrative, symbolic imagery, and changing points of view. Trauma and reclamation find a place in the female body in the novel, which is characterized by violence but also a source of strength. In the end, this research finds *Beloved* to be a feminist archive, one that opposes historical erasure and advocates Black women's visibility of their suffering, love, resistance, and healing. Morrison's works question the racist and patriarchal structures that humiliate Black women and provide a vision of liberation anchored in memory, voice, and community. Applying intersectional feminist theory, the research

adds to the continuing feminist literary conversation by pushing academics and readers both to highlight the perspectives of those long excluded from dominant narratives. Morrison's *Beloved* transforms from a book to a powerful act of emotional and cultural remedial.

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لێكۆڵینه و هیه کی فیمینیستی (مێینهی) له رۆمانی (بیلەفت) ی تۆنی مۆریسۆن

پوخته:

ئەم توێژینه و هیه به دوا داچوون دهکات که چۆن له رۆمانی (بیلەفت) ی تۆنی مۆریسۆن چیرۆکی ناسنامهی ئافرهتی رهشپێست، دایکایهتی و بهرگری له دواي کۆیلايهتی ده نووسیته وه. ههروهها تیروانینیکی فیمینیستی هه مه لایه نه پێشکەش دهکات که ئیلهام له تیۆری فیمینیستی رهشپێست و تیۆری فیمینیستی کلاسیکی وه رگراوه به تاییهتی نووسینهکانی سیمۆن دو بۆقوار و جودیت بهتلەر و ئاودری لۆرد و بیئل هووکس و پاتریشیا هیل کۆلینز. مۆریسۆن پرسیار له سیسته مهکانی چه و ساندنه وه دهکات. ئەم توێژینه و هیه ئیلهامی له چیرۆکی ژبانی راسته قینهی مارگاریت گارنەر وه رگرتوو، بیلەفت و ینهیه کی ترسناک له برینه دهروونی و کۆمه لایه تیهکانی ژبانی رهشپێست پێشکەش دهکات.

له رێگه ی کاره کته رهکانی وه ک سیٹ، دینقەر و به بیی ساگس، مۆریسۆن چیرۆک گێرانه وه ی ناهیلی (نا زنجیره یی)، فره دهنگی، و توخمه سیمبولیه کان به کار ده هیئت، به تاییهتی که سایه تی تارمایی بیلەفت، بۆ جه ختکردنه وه له سه ر ترس، بیدهنگی، و یاده وه ری وه ک ناوه ندیک بۆ ملامانی بۆ ناسنامه، به م شیوه یه روونکردنه وه ی ئه وه ی که چۆن دایکایه تی ده بیته شوینیکی لاوازی و بهرگری سیاسی. ئەم توێژینه و هیه جه خت له وه دهکاته وه که مۆریسۆن نه ک ته نها راستیه مێژوویهکانی کۆیلايه تی ئاشکرا دهکات به لکو کرداریکی ئه ده بی چاکوونه وه ئه نجام ده دات که دهنگی ژبانی رهشپێست، ئازانس، و سه کۆیه ک بۆ ژبانی رهشپێست دابین دهکات. تیروانینی فیمینیستی یه کتر بر رۆمانه که وه ک ره خنه یه کی رادیکال له هه ردوو ره گه زی و زالبوونو پیاو سالاری ده خاته روو، بۆیه به شیوه یه کی به رچاو به شداری له مشتومری ئه ده بی فیمینیستی دهکات.

دراسة نسوية ل(بيلافت) توني موريسون

الملخص:

يستكشف بحثه كيف يعيد بيلفت توني موريسون كتابة قصة هوية الأنثى السوداء والأمومة والمقاومة في أعقاب العبودية. كما أنه يوفر منظورا نسويا متعدد التخصصات مستوحاة من النظرية النسوية السوداء وكذلك النظرية النسوية الكلاسيكية ، وخاصة كتابات سيمون دي بوفوار ، وجوديث بتلر ، وأودري لورد ، وبيل هوكس ، وباتريشيا هيل كولينز. يشكك موريسون في أنظمة القمع. هذه الورقة مستوحاة من السرد الواقعي لمارغريت غارنر ، بيلفت يقدم صورة رهيبية للجروح النفسية والاجتماعية للنساء السود. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن سرد النساء السود ، كما هو موضح في رواية موريسون بيلورث ، يقدم نظرة عميقة على واقع حياتهن من القمع والمقاومة. تثير هذه الروايات القانون النسوي وتتحدى المفاهيم التقليدية للهوية والعدالة. تدعو الدراسة إلى الالتزام المستمر بالتحليل المقطعي في البحث والنشاط النسوي ، مع التأكيد على الحاجة إلى أصوات النساء السود في النضال المستمر من أجل العدالة الاجتماعية.

من خلال شخصيات مثل سيث ودينفر وبيبي سك ، يستخدم موريسون رواية القصص غير الخطية ، والأصوات متعددة الألحان ، والعناصر الرمزية ، وخاصة شخصية شبح الحبيب ، للتأكيد على الصدمة والصمت والذاكرة باعتبارها مركزية للنضال من أجل الهوية ، لذا يوضح كيف تصبح الأمومة موقعا للضعف والمقاومة السياسية. تؤكد هذه الورقة أن موريسون لا يكشف فقط عن الحقائق التاريخية للعبودية ولكنه يقوم أيضا بعمل أدبي للتعافي يوفر أصوات النساء السود ووكالتهم وشفاء المنتدى. يقدم المنظور النسوي التقاطعي الرواية على أنها نقد جذري لكل من الهيمنة العرقية والأبوية ، وبالتالي يساهم بشكل كبير في النقاش الأدبي النسوي.