

Beloved in Search of an Identity: A Reading of *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, Based on Homi K. Bhabha's Theories

Abdol Husein Joodaki

University of Lorestan, Khorramabad, Iran.

Asrin Vajdi

University of Lorestan, Khorramabad, Iran

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Abstract

This study holds written from a post-colonial theoretical stance that *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, is a novel of ambivalence and resistance which questions the established boundaries between Self and Other. It is attempted to examine this novel by Morrison based on theories of poststructuralist theorist, Homi K. Bhabha, who challenges the notions of fixed identities, undermines the binary opposition between oppressed and oppressor and emphasizes the role of language in identity construction. The concepts *stereotype* and *uncanny*, derived from Bhabha's theories, are applied to the novel, and the main focus has been on the unhomely nature of the colonial world and the ambivalent nature of colonial relationships, which leads to resistance on the part of the colonized.

Key Terms: *Beloved*, Unhomely, Uncanny, Stereotype, Morrison, Black, Novel

I. Introduction

Post-colonialism consists of a set of theories in philosophy, economy, politics and literature and it didn't become a major force in literary studies until the early 1990s. It analyzes literature produced by cultures developed in response to colonial domination, from the first point of colonial contact that started with European domination of the new world in the late 15th century to the present. Post-colonialism mostly discusses that although the colonizers retreated and left the lands they had invaded, they left behind a deeply cultural colonization.

In places like United States, the former slave population of displaced Africans who created their own tradition of writing and many works of them, from the poetry of Langston Hughes to the novels of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker, tried to make sense of their history and their constant experience of racism. African American studies as an influential intellectual, social and political movement, not only affected the U.S but also influenced many people who suffered from racial oppression in other parts of the world. African American studies is the study of diasporic people who were moved against their own will from their homelands to serve the economic needs of empires that evolved from the wave of European expansion from the

sixteenth century onward. And, of course, it is the study of the history and continuing effects of specific processes of race-based discrimination within U.S society. Bernard Bell in his book notes that no other ethnic or social group in America has shared anything like the experience of American Blacks, they experienced kidnapping, the Middle Passage, slavery, Southern Plantation Life, Emancipation, Reconstruction, Post- Reconstruction, Northern Migration, urbanization and ongoing racism" (Bell, 1987, p.5).

Chloe Ardelia Woffor, known to the world as Toni Morrison, is an American editor, professor, and Nobel Prize winner for her novel *Beloved*. She was born in Ohio, in the 1930s. Her family during the Great Migration, had first moved to North America, and then headed to Ohio in search of better economic opportunities and greater freedom. Her maternal grandparents and parents were among her early influences. Her stories are imbued with a sense of place, community, purpose and identity under the influence of her parents' response to the world and her grandparent's stories (Gillespie, 2008, p.4). Leaving Lorain High school in 1949, Morrison pursued an undergraduate education at Howard University, a quite color and class conscious environment, in Washington, D.C . Upon graduation, Morrison moved to Ithaca, New York, to earn a master degree from Cornell University. After teaching in several American universities such as Houston, Morrison started her writing career by publishing her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970). Her first novel was followed by *Sula* (1974), *Song of Solomon*(1977) and *Beloved*(1987).Toni Morrison's work has the great capacity of translating the inner, personal and communal life of black people into words and images, but her work is also a consequence of a national awareness of black people's artistic production which has started the Black and Feminist Movements.

Beloved, the story of this study, sets off after American Civil War and is inspired by an African American slave, Margaret Garner, who escaped slavery during 1856 in Kentucky by fleeing to Ohio, a free state. When her owner and a posse arrived to retrieve her and her children, she killed her two year old daughter rather than let her be recaptured. *Beloved's* main character, Sethe, kills her daughter and tries to kill her other children when a posse arrives in Ohio and wants to return them to Sweet Home, a plantation in Kentucky.

In this study, it has been attempted to apply the theories of poststructuralist theorist, Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha is one of the most important thinkers in postcolonial criticism. He has contributed a set of challenging concepts, such as: Hybridity, Mimicry, Ambivalence, the Stereotypes, the Uncanny, the Nation, Otherness, etc. to postcolonial theory. All these concepts reflect the colonized people's ways to resist the unsecured power of the colonizer. Bhabha succeeds in showing colonialism's histories and cultures that intrude on the present demanding to transform our understandings of cross-cultural relations. He states that we should see colonialism not only as straightforward oppression, domination, and violence but also as a period of complex and varied cultural contact and interaction. His writings bring resources from literary and cultural theory to the study of colonial archives.