

MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF MOSTAGANEM

FACULTY OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH



MASTER

Literature and Interdisciplinary Approaches

**Construction of Black Female Identity in neo-Slave
Narratives in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* 1987**

Submitted by:

Manal ABOUB

Board of Examiners

Chair: Mrs Abdelhadi Nadia

University of Mostaganem

Supervisor: Dr. DJAAFRI Yasmina

University of Mostaganem

Examiner: Mrs Aissat Djamila

University of Mostaganem

Academic Year: 2019-2020

Dedication

First of all I dedicate this piece of work to my beloved parents whose love, affection and encouragement made me able to get such a success.

Great thanks to my dear Sister “Amina” who supported me and encouraged me to believe in myself and , to my brothers “Ilyes” , “Sofiane” and “Abdelazize.” and to my nieces “Aya” and “Sirine”.

To my Family and friends for their love and support.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my dearest supervisor Mrs.Djaafri for her invaluable guidance as well as her wise advice, supports and encouragement to finish this thesis.

I am also grateful to my Afro-American Literature teacher Mrs. Abdelhadi who was the source of inspiration of this research.

I am also greatly indebted to Mrs. Aissat for her great instructions in the progress of this research.

Finally, I would express my gratitude to all of my teachers of Abd El Hamid Ibn Badis University during our educational career from the first year to the master degree for their support and cooperation.

Abstract

The aim of the present research is to explore the construction of black female identity in Toni Morrison's neo-Slave narrative *Beloved* (1987). Morrison's novel highlights the effects of slavery upon the female characters. She also points out how slavery contributed in making them believe that their identity vanished and that they have to construct a new one. Therefore, the chief aim of this study is to develop a strong understanding of the different aspects that influence the female character's identity realization. The study employs Black Feminist theory to examine the black female harsh experiences in a society dominated by white supremacy. This research work attempts to focus on the development and formation of black female identity in Toni Morrison's novel and in the era of neo-slave narratives.

Keywords: Black Female Identity, Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, neo-Slave Narratives, Slavery , Black Feminism.

Table of Content

Dedication	I
Acknowledgments.....	II
Abstract.....	III
Contents.....	IV
General Introduction.....	1

Chapter One: Historical Background of neo-Slave Narratives

I.Introduction.....	4
I.1Defining neo-Slave Narratives	4
I.2 Other Overviews about neo-Slave Narratives.....	4
I.3 Major Forms of neo-Slave Narratives.....	6
I.4 Neo-slave Narrative’s Developments.....	6
I.5 Neo-Slave Narrative’s Characteristics	8
I.6 Conclusion	11

Chapter Two: The Quest of Black Female Identity in neo-Slave Narratives

II. Introduction.....	13
II.1 The Concept of Identity.....	13
II.2 Black Female Identity.....;	15
II.2.1 Black Female Identity during Slavery.....	16
II.2.2 Black Female Identity during the Contemporary Period.....	17
II.2.3 Black Female Identity’s Characteristics.....	18
II.3 The Genesis of Contemporary Black Feminism.....	19
II.3.1 The Emergence of Contemporary African-American Women Writers.....	20
II.3.2 Birth of neo-Slave Narratives.....	20
II.3.3 Black Female Identity from Black Feminism.....	21
II.4 Conclusion.....	24

Chapter Three: *Beloved: A textual Study*

III.Introduction.....	26
-----------------------	----

III.1 Biography of Toni Morrison.....	26
III.1 An Overview of <i>Beloved</i> (1987).....	27
III.3 Plot Summary.....	27
III.4 Major themes.....	28
III.4.1 Slavery in <i>Beloved</i>	28
III.4.2 Motherhood in <i>Beloved</i>	30
III.4.3 Black Female Identity in <i>Beloved</i>	30
III.4.3.1 Black Identity Construction of Female Characters in <i>Beloved</i>	32
III.4.3.1.1 Sethe's Quest for Identity.....	32
III.4.3.1.2 Beloved's Quest for Identity.....	33
III.4.3.1.3 Denver's Quest for Identity.....	34
III.5 Conclusion.....	35
General Conclusion	36
Works Cited	38

General Introduction

The Black community has greatly suffered slavery and its appalling tragedies. Although the Emancipation Proclamation Act of 1863 abolished slavery, Afro-Americans still find themselves unacceptable in the white community and they suffer from the psychological, economic and social effects of slavery. Narratives about Blacks are filled with representations of the assaults of slavery, especially on enslaved Black women. Black writers focus on a specific subset of neo-slave narratives that rely on antirealistic depictions of slavery. In the middle of the twentieth century, many authors have found their voices through this sub-literary genre, namely neo-Slave narrative, and which often addresses possibilities of slave experience and re-memory absent from many slave narrative writings. Unlike previous writers, the contemporary writers discuss slavery from the perspective of free citizens who have learned, but not lived, the history of societies in which their characters exist. Hence, slavery is a consistent topic in literature for hundreds of years, most often in the form of neo-slave narratives.

Black Female Identity is the focal point of feminist criticism, as one of the major themes of 1960's and 1970's contemporary literature in United States. The theme was associated with current social issues and focused on such problems as black women political, economic, and social rights. That is why, contemporary writers, in particular female ones, pay an exceptional attention to the topic.

Toni Morrison stands among the black feminist writers who tend to defy the bitterness and the terrible secrecy of black females' life. Morrison succeeds brilliantly in depicting the issue of black female identity in her novel *Beloved* (1987). The primary focus of this study is the aspects of Black Feminism and how the author approaches the influence of racism on black females' individual identity. In the novel at hand, Morrison draws a clear image about the protagonist's strife while attempting to shape her identity.

The aim of this thesis is to focus mainly on Black Feminist aspects (1970) in forming a Black Female Identity. Otherwise said, the objective is to pick out all the instances in which Black Female Identity was destroyed in *Beloved* and how it managed to be reconstructed. To explore this issue, some questions are raised:

- What are the literary influences of Toni Morrison and what is the purpose of neo-slave narratives ?

- How does the black female construct their identity in the era of feminist movement ?
- How does the main characters construct their identity as women in *Beloved*?

It is hypothesized that the body and the identity of the black woman in the United States has been under siege for many years. They were exploited, abused and subjected to violence by the white majority. Silent and victimized makes their situation even worst. This silence has affected their development, their relationships, their emotions and more has impacted on distorting their sense of identity. It also hypothesized that women have found their destination in literature. Their strong desire for freedom and for acceptance as full citizens in their country has encouraged them to use literature as a strong means to tell and share their stories, hopes, and pains with the world. The long history that is darkened by racism exhausts them; therefore, their refuge is to write and express themselves as humans capable of creation and fiction.

This work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is entitled “Historical Background of neo-Slave Narratives”. This chapter checks the basic events that led to appearance of the sub-literary genre. The second chapter will provide an understanding of Black Female Identity. The third chapter analyses *Beloved (1987)* by Toni Morrison to show how black female characters strive to (re)construct their identity.

Chapter One

Historical Background of neo-Slave Narratives

Introduction

The twentieth century American novelists played a highly significant role in the history of American literature and made a distinct contribution to modern fiction. Afro-American writers have tried to retrieve elements of the narrative structure and thematic configuration of slave narratives. The key reasons for this desire to reinvent a genre that officially lost its relevance with the abolition of slavery are the urge to reaffirm the historical importance of the original slave narrative and to re-imagine their subjectivity to recover the dignity of the slaves. African American writers turn to neo-Slave Narratives; a sub-genre of historical fiction, which often addresses the possibilities of slave experience and re-memory absent from many writings during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The present chapter will be devoted to clarify “neo-Slave narratives” as modern literary of fictions that appeared in United States of America and the events that led to its emergence.

1.1 Defining neo-Slave Narratives

Neo-slave narratives, a sub-literary genre that emerged in the 1960's, are new fictional accounts of slavery that show the enduring legacy of slavery that emerged in the latter part of the twentieth century. Neo-slave narrative is a combination of historical and fictional form of the slave narrative, and it gives more importance to the psychological and social oppression. It were written by people who had not traditionally experience slavery but they are descendants or people who felt the impact of it. Moreover, they have diverse narrators and audience.

Such modern narratives published after the Second World War grapple with the injustice of the history of slavery, including texts set in the era of bondage and continue to the present. In reality, neo-slave narratives, especially those written by black women and focused on female characters, work to revisit, reclaim, and resituate women within a context from which they have been largely excluded.

The fictional form becomes more popular. Starting with *Margaret Walker's Jubilee* (1966), contemporary novels such as *Ernest J. Gaines's The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* (1971), *Sherley Ann Williams's Dessa Rose* (1986), *Toni Morrison's Beloved* (1987), *Charles Johnson's Middle Passage* (1990).. etc. The genre of fiction is one of the forms of African American literature which is widely read and discussed.

1.2 General Overviews about neo-Slave Narratives

The term neo-slave narrative is attributed to Bernard Bell as the first writer who coining the term and inaugurating scholarship on it. In “*The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*”

(1987), Bell defines the neo-slave narrative as “residually oral, modern narratives of escape from bondage to freedom” (Bell,289). Bell’s definition describes characters within a text that escape to freedom that were once in servitude.

This literary genre, which includes some of the most compelling fiction produced in the last fifty years, has evolved to include texts set during the period of slavery as those set afterwards, at any time from the era of civil war until the present. In Ashraf H. A. Rushdy reconceptualizes the hyphenated term neo-slave narrative and popularizes it to describe the novelistic genre that challenges the historiography of slavery while revisiting and reworking narratives of slavery of the 18th and 19th centuries. This more specific use, “What I call “Neo-slave narratives,” that is, contemporary novels that assume the form adopt the conventions, and take on the first-person voice of the antebellum slave narrative” (Rushdy 3). The use of the hyphenated term neo-slave narrative in Rushdy’s view 1999 differs from its use in Bell 1987 in the periodization and distinctions drawn between fictional varieties of the literary form: historical, social realist, magic realist, genealogical, and palimpsest novel, to name a few categories.

In other words, Rushdy is focusing on one form of contemporary slavery. There are contemporary novels that share the stories of the pre-Civil War period concerning slavery. Rushdy writes, “ I am able to explore in some detail the social logic of the literary form of Neo-slave narrative: its origins in the social, intellectual, and racial formations of the sixties, its cultural politics as these texts intervene indebates over the significance of race, and its literary politics as these texts make statements on engagements between texts and between mainstreamand minority traditions “ (3).

Munoz-Valdivieso 2001 shares the history of African Americans with the pioneers mentioned above in her article “Neo-Slave Narratives in Contemporary Black British Fiction.” She contended that, “In this more specific use, “neo-slave narratives” are particular kinds of slavery fiction, those that recreate the first-person narrator of the original texts written (or dictated) by the former slaves themselves” (Valdivieso ,43). Munoz-Valdivieso shares the view that the neo-slave narratives are recreated stories from former slaves sharing their life experiences in written text form. She notes that the authors take the real life stories of former slaves and use them in their novels with fictitious characters and narrators. The first-person narrators are the former slaves telling their own life stories as they relate to slavery.

Keizer 2004 gives the descriptive label, “contemporary narratives of slavery” and argues that the “literary works themselves theorize about the nature and formation of black subjects,

under the slave system and in the present, by utilizing slave characters and the condition of slavery as focal points” (Keizer,1). Therefore, Smith 2007 uncovers how the neo-slave narrative, or what the author calls “retrospective literature about slavery” branches out from the first-person testimonial narrative form as a “realistic” representation of slavery and notes how the contemporary narratives exist in diverse forms (Smith,168). In a similar vein, Spaulding 2005 emphasizes the “reformation of the historiography of slavery” in what the author terms “the postmodern slave narrative” (Spaulding,25) that includes third-person narration, parody, satire, and science fiction replete with polyphony, temporal gaps and shifts, haunting, and elements of the fantastic. Ryan 2008 further complicates the categorization, rejecting a purely aesthetic or historical interpretation of the genre. Murphy 2014 offers modern views of the slave narrative with first-person survivor accounts of present-day forced labor.

1.3 Major Forms of neo-Slave Narratives

There are three kinds of neo-slave narratives ; Historical narratives about slavery that were developed in the south of antebellum and novels of social realism or magical realism in the post-reconstruction period or in America in the 20/21 century. Everyone shares the view that slavery is an aspect of history whose effects are still being felt today. The second subgenre is formed by the novels that deal with the aftermaths of slavery as experienced by contemporary Americans which Rushdy calls the pseudo autobiographical slave narrative. The third kind of neo-slave narrative is a “relatively original form of writing about slavery” (Rushdy 533-535) and was formed just after the Civil Rights era. They are the genealogical narrative or a novel of remembered generations, which tells the story of a family’s experiences with slavery (Rushdy,90).

1.4 Neo-Slave Narrative’s Development

Slavery played a central role during the American Civil War (1861-1865). It was the primary catalyst for secession, especially Southern political leaders' resistance to attempts by Northern antislavery political forces to block the expansion of slavery into the western territories. “The North won and in 1865 the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery in thirty states was ratified” (Fitzgerald,2192). After the Reconstruction, many slave narratives were still written down. Their continued popularity was due to, amongst others, the idea that the narratives would show the white people that slavery had prepared the former slaves for a new life in which they were free and able to participate in the newly structured

society. Furthermore, “the slave narratives could show that the African Americans wanted progress for both the white and black population and reminded the people of how the existence of slavery had threatened the nation” (Andrews,669). However, this genre became less optimistic during the Long Depression of the years from 1873 to 1896; a period of global economic recession. Slave narratives had started to subside in volume, although there were still plenty of writers who published works concerning the legacy of slavery and its social consequences. Two well-known examples are *Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God* from 1937 and *Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man* from 1952. These novels were part of a new form of the slave narrative genre called the neo-slave narrative.

This contemporary novels coincided with the civil rights movement. At this time, “the New Left was a powerful movement that focused on, among others, racial equality, the Vietnam War, and redesigning the structure of social and educational institutions “(Winkler 229, 230, Rushdy 4).They focus on people outside the education system”, they saw how history was not only recorded by the elite, whose descriptions Lemisch regarded as atypical, but also by the people of lower classes who had experienced it too “(Kraditor 530). These scholars realized how important the old antebellum slave culture still was, and renewed their interest in the original slave narratives, the folklore, and the old slave community. It became apparent how vital the slaves’ culture had been in the psychological as well as physical resistance of the slaves to their masters. Nichols noted as early as 1959 that authors such as John Hope Franklin regarded the ““narratives’ [as] an important source for the study of slavery in America” (Nichols,162). Thus, the method of writing history from the bottom up became part of the development “of [the] contemporary discourse on slavery”(Rushdy,5-6) and the scholars’ new methods and views concerning slavery and history created a new chapter in African-American culture that revived the slave narrative genre. A well known example in that chapter is white author William Styron’s *Confessions of Nat Turner*, which was written from the slave’s perspective and is regarded by Rushdy as “the sixties’ most representative novel”, though perhaps mostly because it had slavery as its topic (Rushdy,6). Another key work is « *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman* » by Ernest J. Gaines, which “exemplifies the links between slavery and the sixties by having its protagonist live out both epochs” (Rushdy, 6). Both novels give fictionalized, personal accounts of slavery history and ”have links to the political and cultural ideologies of the sixties “(Rushdy,6).

The Black Power Movement was another movement that influenced the genre of neo-slave narratives. It gave the African Americans “the sense of subjective empowerment” that helped them to invent new ways to portray slavery (Rushdy,534). The neo-slave narrative

genre supported the Black Power Movement and the Civil Rights Movement in its effort to help portray the situation of African Americans in the sixties, which was still far from equal. That portrayal in its turn provided the basis of the neo-slave narratives of the seventies and eighties. The writers, who themselves were culturally formed during the sixties, commented via the neo-slave narrative genre on the mistakes of the New Left and Black Power Movement and those movements' hopes for the future (Rushdy,5).

Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, there has been an increase in the emergence of studies on the neo-slave narratives. Levecq and Timothy A. Spaulding 2012 address questions such as “why the genre is still so popular and what its deeper meaning might be and thus contribute to the improved understanding of the genre”(Rushdy,504). Rushdy, one of the most prominent scholars on neo-slave narratives, has analysed the fictional genre from the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the “field of cultural production” in his book *Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form* (Rushdy8). As Levecq summarizes in her review of that book, Bourdieu situates his analysis of cultural production over against various forms of formalism, which view literary works as autonomous from the social conditions of their production, circulation, and consumption, and the mimetic model, according to which literature directly reflects these conditions. Bourdieu proposes the notion of field to counteract a purely internal or purely external form of analytics. Because it is relatively autonomous, the field of cultural production, itself characterized by power relationships among its different constituents (such as writers, publishers, critics, institutions), “does not reflect but refracts factors external to it, which belong to the larger field of power”(Levecq,161).

1.5 Neo-Slave Narrative's Characteristics

The neo-slave narratives use the fictional slave in the novel as a narrator or subject, or the narrator might have ancestors who were slaves. In general, this contemporary narratives reclaim the old slave culture, because it was vital for the survival of the African-American slaves and it was significant element in the slave narrative genre. As Rushdy supposes “The slave culture kept the slaves from becoming enslaved in their minds, even though physically they were” (Rushdy,533). They often used speech music and religious texts in their narratives, giving the slave culture an additional didactic function.

Contemporary authors of neo-slave narratives actually combine the old traditional methods of story telling with elements of black folklore. That movement away from realism is specific for neo-slave narratives,” because they are not restrained by the necessity to write

‘the truth’ and provide the reader with proof” (Vint 243-244). In fact, as Spaulding states, “all the claims of authenticity and objectivity only complicate the view on the past and therefore contest the idea that realism is the best style to use when writing historical fiction”(5). Shockley 2013 has also noted that trend, but in a different area of literature. She observes “an explosion of historical poems by African-Americans [that] has brought with it a noticeable increase in poems treating the era, the institution, the condition of slavery”(792). These poems are written in a variety of styles, but have in common that they try to deal with a painful aspect of African-American history through imagination (792).

Robinson 2012 affirms the idea that neo-slave narratives do not necessarily have to follow the traditional methods of the slave narrative writings. For example, when addressing romance. Robinson states that” during the antebellum period, romance was not a part of the slave narratives. This was firstly because the slave owners did not allow the slaves to have romances, since that would suggest that the slaves actually had human feelings and thus were human”(Robinson 41,44). Even in marriage, the slave owners would not allow emotion, they controlled wives' choice as a way to control slave and they would also use the slaves for breeding. Which meant that slaves sometimes had to have intercourse with someone else than their spouse, in order to produce off spring. The second reason was that the element of romance did not fit in well with the goal of the historical slave narrative genre. The abolitionists wanted the readers to see how the (ex-) slaves were denied their humanity, but a romance would show the reader how the slave “could be human despite slavery” (Robinson, 40). Romance was occasionally discussed, but only if it served the abolitionists’ cause (Robinson,42). By ignoring the romance subject, the abolitionists tried to make it appear as if love relationships were impossible for the pitiful slaves. Obviously this does not mean that the slaves did not have romantic relations; it just meant that they hid them in their narratives. Zora Neale Hurston warned that white people would never think of the African-American people as humans without the element of romance in their fictional lives (Robinson,44). This is probably also why Hurston gave her protagonist Janie such a full love-life in the modern slave narrative *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (Robinson,52). During the 1960s the African-American writers were able to speak about black romance and thus affirm their human emotions even more (Robinson,44).

Another new topic that could be discussed during the 1960s was that of sexuality amongst slaves. As discussed above, the slaves were seen as live ‘kstock that could be used for breeding. Bourdieu observes that enslaved women were “under a double bondage”, because they had to work in the fields and act as sexual objects (Campbell,244). In the past few

decades rape has been reinterpreted as a method of exerting power rather than a method to satisfy sexual lust. Furthermore, laws have been changed to acknowledge the crimes of rape in war time (Sagawa & Robbins 3).

It is a shrill contrast to the antebellum period, when the female African-American authors of slave narratives were usually not allowed to write about rape, because it was considered an unfit subject for literature that might be read by women. In fact ,when these authors did manage to incorporate rape into their slave narratives, the subject would be regarded as proof of the author's lack of morale, such as in the case of Thomas Pringle's Narrative of Sojourner Truth where he left out certain accusations towards her "sexual depravity" (Sagawa & Robbins 4). The African-American female was often accused of being nymphomaniac and seductive, which legitimated white men's sexual abuse of their slaves (Sagawa and Robbins 4). The neo-slave narratives can show readers that sex between African Americans was not animalistic, but could come from human emotions (Robinson,46). In addition, the contemporary neo-slave narratives can freely deal about a subject such as abortion (Robinson, 51). The issue of sexual agency is not only important as an argument against slavery, but also for "women as an oppressed group" (Vint,244). According to Canadian statistics, only 10% of sexual assaults are reported, a percentage that might be changed by discussing the subject of rape and sexual agency in literature (Sagawa & Robbins5).

The notion of gender plays an important role in the neo-slave narratives and even more in those written by women. In the original slave narrative genre, the transition to freedom was different for women than for men. For the male slaves the three stages were literacy, identity and freedom. While for female slaves, the stages were family, identity and freedom. The neo-slave narratives have broken with that tradition, starting with Walker's Jubilee 1966, which focuses on the story of a biracial slave during the American Civil War. Walker shed a light on everyday aspects of female slaves' life by showing the female slaves as full, motherly women, instead of genderless objects, the neo-slave narrative genre celebrates "the heroic status of the enslaved mother" and there by can inspire all contemporary black women (Levecq 138).The neo-slave narratives can take liberties with the conventions of the original slave narratives, mixing different genres in one work of literature. But more importantly, the new shape of the genre also provides new ways to help on a social level, thus enabling literature to do important 'cultural work'. Sagawa and Robbins have noticed a trend in literature by and about enslaved women and proposed that "the time seems ripe for revaluation" of that genre (Sagawa & Robbins 2). Neo-slave narratives can offer a chance to redeem the wrongs towards African-American women, romance, and sexuality, since the genre can provide readers with

accounts of aspects of slavery that the antebellum slave narratives could not (Robinson 40). Aside from that fiction “will not give us the whole story about social justice, but it can be a bridge both to vision of justice and to the social enactment of that vision” (Nussbaum 12). Telling the slave stories in neo-form provides a method to resist the injustice of maintaining errors in history, or forgetting history altogether (Sagawa and Robbins 1).

I.6 Conclusion

The neo-slave narrative is an artistic medium used by African Americans to spread awareness about and to reconcile with their history. It was founded in the 1960s and developed due to social, intellectual and institutional changes in African American life. This chapter has contained general other views of famous scholars and the three major forms of neo-slave narratives and all that goes with it such as emergence and characteristics. Black female identity has always been at the heart of the neo-slave narratives, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Two

The Quest of the Black Female Identity in neo-Slave Narratives

Introduction

Black female identity is considered as an important theme developed during the twentieth century Afro-American literature. The role of contemporary literature and specifically the neo-slave narratives were a storage and reservoir of the African American history and documentation of their culture which in a way contributed a great deal in shaping the black female identity. First, this chapter will tackle the issue of black female identity in neo-slave narratives and how African American women struggled to gain their identities. The section will start with an overview about the concept of identity. Then, it will be devoted in particular to the black female identity during slavery and contemporary period. Finally, this chapter will end with an important movement called Black women movement, which had a great impact on increasing black women's experience and their traditions in African American writing.

II.1 The Concept of Identity

Identity as a term and concept has a long history. Etymologically, identity, as it was originated in 1603, is derived from Middle French *identité*, and earlier Latin *identitatem* (nom. *identitas*,5c.), which means 'sameness'. Identity as a broad concept is described in various ways for instance I, me, personality, self and essence; these elements help anybody to understand who is he internally within the external world. According to Tatum D, to be aware of identity, one needs to ask the question who I Am? The answer to this question seems easy to some while others find it difficult to give an appropriate answer because they are ignorant of its true meaning and do not have the ability to explain it.

Among the scholars who tried to give a definition to identity, one can mention the scholar James D. Fearon in his article "what is Identity" (1999), where he states that identity has two related meanings classified as social and personal and Identity in its present incarnation has double senses. It refers at the same time to social classes and to the origins of an individual's self-respect or dignity. According to him identity has two meanings, identity within group of people within the same category of group that share the same characteristics and the second sense refers to identity within the person himself as pride or honor for his dignity.

Through these explanations and definitions of different scholars from different fields who have defined identity, one can conclude that identity is an unstable process that develops throughout life. It includes many aspects that cannot be controlled, such as the colour of the skin, the gender of the individual and even the place where he was born and raised. The

process of identity is a never-ending process that goes beyond the onset of adolescence. Identity development becomes more and more pronounced during youth, because this is the phase in which the individual becomes more concerned with a sense of the self and formulating independent values and opinions that are distinct from the others, background and described (gender) role. Identity is based on several interlocking forces that we mentioned above, as the latter helps one to present themselves to others and thus to form their own identity.

Black identity is a multifaceted topic that is further complicated by the historical presence of blacks in the United States since the middle ages and the persistence of racism in the country. Black identity is created through certain physical features that apply to blacks such as skin colour, gender, profession, sexual preferences, religion, language, etc. The combination of these features then distinguishes us from other people. "The term 'African American' is usually reserved for blacks whose ancestors came to the United States involuntarily as slaves and whose history is deeply entwined with Jim Crow laws ¹of the American South and the Civil Rights Movement " (Akbar,20).

To delve deeper into black identity we have to understand its interrelated dimensions because this concept does not stand alone as it pertains to all spheres of life the self, culture, ethnicity, gender, language, and sexuality. Cultural critic Kobena Mercer emphasises its contradictory nature by suggesting that like any other keyword, "identity" calls for a number of competing definitions"(Kobena Mercer,424). Black identity is related to the idea of race and culture which may certainly conflict in the emergence of the individual. Karen Cerulo 1997 believes that "identity" is characterised by ideas, ideologies and ways of seeing the world ar complicated by the historical presence of blacks in the United States as a significant minority population and the persistence of racism in the country around us."(Cerulo,1)

Therefore, blackness became more known as a political issue than a personal one. The Blacks' resistance was viewed an important political act in their history. Thompson and Akbar 2003 have considered this particular understanding of racial identity as a sociopolitical strategy, 'involv[ing] recognition of the groups' shared background, history and struggle against oppression and domination' (Akbar,84). This idea suggests that identity politics is the result of dehumanization of African Americans under slavery and its aftermath." In literature, an individual's identity, whether cultural or individual, has an impact on how he or she views

¹Jim Crow laws were laws created by white southerners to enforce **racial segregation** across the South from the 1870s through the 1960s. <https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/us-history/the-gilded-age/south-after-civil-war/a/jim-crow>

himself or The Politics” (Min Pun,54).This means that African American literature is influenced by how the African American writers perceive themselves and the world around them. As a result, identity is an important study in African American literature.

II.2 Black Female Identity

'Black female identity' has always been at the heart of studies and research of various disciplines across centuries. Many scholars of different fields disagreed upon formulating an appropriate concept to it. However, this concept is crucial in Afro-American literature especially in contemporary literature. Judith Kegan Gardiner was one of the advocate against the cause of female identity, she points out in her article "On Female Identity and Writing by Women", " identity is a central concept for much contemporary cultural and literary criticism" (Gardiner,347). She argues also that the idea of identity actually comes "along with its even vaguer terminological twin , the "self" (Gardiner,347).

The black woman was described as a powerful woman in several literary works like Lorraine Hansberry, Toni Morrison, Ishmael Reed and Toni Cade Bambara. Due to the all kinds of violence they endured, and that created a problem in identifying her identity. Also, in her contribution to the conversation on the Black female identity, Ruiz (2012) focuses on the perception of the Black female's body. She suggests that the body of the Black woman is the repository of memory thus; it becomes a cardinal aspect in rewriting Black women's history. The body of the Black female is conventionally perceived "as strong reproductive bodies suitable for the hard work on plantations, representing the opposite of the weakness and delicacy of the White female body" (Ruiz ,7).

The African American female identity was rocked and deformed. Hence, Black feminist writers shed light on that danger that threatened and shook the black female identity. Many works and novels addressed and tackled that main point to clarify and uncover the reality of the sexual abuse the black female was exposed to. Thus, a new understanding sprang which marks the growing of new African American female identity. Lorde explains, "The differential treatment these women endure transcends sexual orientation, and ultimately gives rise to African American women's self-defined point" (Auletto and Sables systemki 272).

The tyrannical slavery system reduced black beauty and the physical appearance of the black women. Hence, feelings of ugliness and insecurity are generated by African American women. Black feminist writers glorify their blackness and their distinct beauty by describing themselves in a new stunning way, "one of the profound liberating effects of the rise in black

feminist literature is the ability of African American women writers to reconstruct the beauty norm for black females outside the dominant controlling images of white beauty standards” (Beaulieu51). They are trying to change the marginalized image that slavery has imposed on black female that black does not means ugliness.

II.2.1 Black Female Identity during Slavery

Usually, when the history of America is mentioned, the issue of slavery is brought to our minds that lasted for more than two centuries (1619-1865). It is marked by continuous dehumanization, humiliation, racial segregation and exploitation. African Americans were viewed as people with no history, no cultural heritage, no tradition, and no identity in white America. This made them considered as the underclass of American society for not having cultural, ethnic and linguistic values.

Toni Morrison, one of the leading contemporary African American authors, states that prejudice and racism against African-Americans had two purposes; It has been a distraction against recognizing the unfair class differences in the country , and it has united Americans with all other immigrants, who can claim to be white and therefore part of mainstream simply because they are black (Morrison,53). However, according to Morrison, America would not be as it is today without the contributions of black negroes. “ America would not be what it is without the presence of black-America was ‘incoherent ’without the inclusion of African-Americans’ contributions to the forming of nation , its history , language, literature and culture” (Christian,75). She presents a similar view in her book of essays on the presence of blackness in American literature *Playing in the Dark* (1992) in which she tries to prove that Africanism is an inseparable part in defining Americanness. Thus Morrison views black American history as the history of whole American experience (Morrison,14).

The Americans committed heinous crimes against the Africans as they ended up stripping them of their humanity and erased their identity. The white man's claim to the slave body, male as well as female, was inherent in the concept of the slave trade. Throughout the period of slavery in America, the black woman's body was seen as primitive and brutal because they were attractive for all white men even the masters often felt it their right to engage in sexual activity with black women. Sometimes, female slaves acquiesced to advances hoping that such relationships would increase the chances that they or their children would be freed by the master. These sexual flavours left a sense of parity between black wives and husbands. This sort of abuse not only shook their sense of individuality, self-esteem and

self-determination but also misrepresented them to the world as a sexual object “the image of the ‘bad’ black woman, in particular, which has persisted into the twentieth century.

Black women rebelled against the inhumanity of slave owners to restore their personal dignity and that of their families. Despite the difficult circumstances, slave women played their full motherhood seriously towards their children. They put their responsibilities for their children before their own safety and freedom, gave the full love and tenderness to those babies. The sexual and reproductive health of African American women have been compromised due to multiple experiences of racism, including discriminatory healthcare practices from slavery through the post-Civil Rights era.

II.2.2 Black Female Identity during the Contemporary Period

The abolition of slavery was a bright beginning to a new difficult era that revealed how whites viewed blacks as inferior. Here, it became clear enough for the black that it was never a matter of a slave person or a free person. Racism had always been a major issue in America for long years. The black females were discriminated in a number of ways. Racism affected their lifestyle facets so badly such as education, region of residence, employment, occupational distributions and economic opportunities. So, the damage of slavery had been replaced by the impact of racism.

The United States justice system has done a little to protect Black women over the last two hundred years. The twenty-first century continues to reverberate from the detrimental psychological remnants of the dehumanizing institution of slavery. Black women continue to suffer from the trauma they endured as a result of the dynamics of the societal structure of their world during and after slavery. Moreover, that social structure, by its very nature, imposed a code of silence upon Black women, which continues to exist to the contemporary period. Through their muted tongues, Black women have unwittingly enabled and protected those who have abused them for decades Black and White men. The genesis of this silence is rooted in slavery and can be found by the absence of legal protections for slaves in general and for female slaves in particular. The law gave Black female slaves the "silent treatment".

As a consequence to Jim Crow and the continued sexual abuse of Black women, silence became a necessary tool for their survival. After passage of the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments, the law was no longer silent on the issue of whether Black women were included among those persons protected by it; rather, the law imposed a new silence by failing to apply the law to them in a just and equitable manner, using mitigating factors to deny them justice.

Recently, Black women are one of the most active groups of voters in America and they are creating greater opportunities for their communities through their leadership in social movements such as Black Lives Matter, Say Her Name, and the national domestic workers' movement for fair labour protections and dignified working conditions.

II.2.3 Black Female Identity's Characteristics

The process of forming a black female identity knows many difficulties where it is not shaped individually, but in relation to others around them. Among the most prominent of the difficulties that faced the Africans Americans in creating an identity for themselves is that white people have defined their existence. According to Neal (2001), "It is trying for any African American to derive satisfaction or pride from their name because Americans "designate people of African descent as Negro—the name that marked them as slaves—or black, which describes them physically but deprives them of cultural identity" (52). Neal adds also "What happened to Black identity under the American impact were twin processes: its dis-Africanization, on one side, and its racialization on the other" (52-53). Neal raises several questions in her article on the issue of black identity, "Does the name determine the status or reality of a thing?" Or "does the reality of a thing determine the name, definition, conceptualization, and interpretation?" (Neal,52). The purpose of her questions is to find out if the names of blacks have the power to construct their identity.

Octavia Butler's Kindred shows that black women were colonized twice, first by the patriarchy domination in which the black men themselves under the notion that women take the lower position than men in the society. Secondly, black women were colonized by European colonizer who controlled the land based on their rules. In the patriarchal domination society, women were treated as colonized object. As in the comparison between women and men, there was a significant difference that black women were more marginalized in the social activities. The position of women during the invasion of European was even worst that they were not only treated as slaves but inhuman because of by their race and their gender.

Black women, like other women throughout the world were distinguished by a spirit of love and sacrifice of tenderness, and this was observed through their maternal role that they was exercised during the period of bondage. This defined role which has been imposed on them became their sole source of identity carved by the society. While Toni Morrison considers motherhood as an essential experience for women, she is of the view that the roles of women in the society should not be limited to motherhood, nor does she restrict motherhood to biological maternity.

II.3 The Genesis of Contemporary Black Feminism

Black women were trapped by the slavery institution where they witnessed the darkest days ever in an endless circle of exploitation. The same as men, they were cruelly treated, demeaned, dehumanized, persecuted and over worked. Besides that, they were raped and coerced into sexual acts. Jean and Feagin declare: “slavery was riddled with torture and brutality toward enslaved women and men, and this brutality often had a sexual dimension” (Jean and Feagin,104).

The Black female’s situation was not that good after the Emancipation Act. The end of slavery had never ended her ordeal. After slavery, the black female became a victim of a new system that is based on subjugation and discrimination. So, the damage of slavery had been replaced by the impact of racism. Racism highlighted that era and influenced Black women’s life facets.

In a racist society, the Black woman found herself physically unacceptable simply because her skin colour and face features were distinct from the white ones. Black female were discriminated because of their physical appearance and shape. They were prevented from feeling themselves as black women since their black beauty was denied according to the white standards of beauty. Moor and Cosut point out the dilemma,

Given the racist past and present of the United States, there are several identity and beauty issues that African American women face, since 1619, African American women and their beauty have been juxtaposed against white beauty have been juxtaposed against white beauty standards, particularly pertaining to their skin colour and hair. (351)

Black female feel scattered and question her values and identity from the white percepectives. At this regard , black female lost faith in her blackness and no more able to discover her stunning beauty as all she could see and read the degrading looks on her. She was lost because she saw herself from white racist eyes which made her wishing to be someone else. Thus, African American women discover that being secured from that destroying oppression cannot be fulfilled by remaining silent. Black female who voiced their rejection to oppression and discrimination are to be black feminist. Among many political movements that appeared from the period 1960 to 1970, Black feminism raised to make to make a woman's voice heard. It coincided with the “second wave” of feminism which touched on every area of women’s experience including politics, work, the family, and sexuality

Black feminism plays a major role in helping women take back their sense of black identity and their womanness. The shared opinions and knowledge by black females make them feel the unity and strength they need. Feeling proud for who they are provides them ease in their life. For it is the simplest yet the most relevant thing, the feeling of being normal and acceptable. Barbara Smith 1982 declares, “One of the greatest gifts of Black feminism to ourselves has been to make it a little easier simply to be Black and female.”(36)

II.3.1 The Emergence of Contemporary African-American Women Writers

The twentieth century has been a period of intense literary activity for African American women writers. It was the first time when these talented writers started to write and express their creative genius. Where about twenty-five novels were produced in addition to major dramatic works, and volumes of poetry were released. This event has been called by some critics the beginning of the second renaissance of black women’s writing, whereas others consider this moment as the emergence of black literary postmodernism (Dubey, Goldberg,569). Black postmodern literature shares many features common to all postmodernism(s), it is characterized as self-conscious, self-reflexive, and it first of all aims to revise history, identity, and aesthetics.

Black women writers started to express themselves truly and freely for the first time. Their works became their manifesto. Their works undoubtedly portray their growth, struggle and accomplishment. The twentieth century women writers have explored every possible genre of literature: fiction, nonfiction, formal, informal, poetry, stories, essays, autobiographies and others. They have chartered unknown territories and set a new unprecedented trend. African American women writers have given readers powerful insights into grim issues such as race, black identity, gender and class,

II.3.2 Birth of neo-Slave Narratives

Since 1970, Black modernist women turned to the neo-slave narratives during the women’s movement. They focused primarily on the slave experience in America from the perspective of the African American slave woman. Often loosely basing their work on historical documents and court cases. Black women writers have tackled several issues related to the events of their time where the black female is the central element of the study. It is right to say that contemporary women writers not only African American women’s literary tradition but they also enrich this tradition with new elements making it more significant. Women writers touched on topics related to their familiar history such as female friendship,

search for and discovery of identity and community, racial oppression, sexual violence, and the importance of ancestry. Among these writers of the contemporary period stand Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou to cite but a few. Their common goal to express their attitude to intersection of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. All of these social issues that occurred in the bondage period were present in their literary writings.

Black authors tend to write in such genre due to the lack of slave narratives by and about women and to cover the gaps and the silence often left in the original slave narratives for example : *The Interesting Narrative of life of Oluadah Equiano*. Equiano An American Slave, Written by Himself , *Harriet Jacob's (Linda Brent's) Incident of the life of Slave Girl* (1861), *Harriet E. Wilson's Our Nig* (1859) and *Hannah Craft's The Bondswomen Narrative* (2002)..ect The majority of these narratives focused on the lives of male slaves and were aimed only at a white audience. The neo-slave narratives appeared for a variety of reasons and took a variety of forms. They tend to focus on the specific details of female enslavement .

II.3.3 Black Female Identity from Black Feminism

“A space is needed to ache loudly; a groan must be released. If pain is silenced, it will never go away and it will never be cured”. According to this wisdom, black females challenge their bitter reality and voice their suffering to the world. In various pieces of writing, Black feminism emerged to shape and assert a new identity to the black female. Black female writers tend to draw a new image that destroys all the false stereotypes against the African-American female.

Black feminist writers have tackled many issues where the black female is the central element of the study. The black feminist literature diagnoses the African-American woman position in a racist and patriarchal society and gives a voice to the unheard offense and oppression she was exposed to. Black feminist writings serve to criticize and question the stereotypes and the modelled identity for the black female. This unique sort of literature treats different themes such as sexual violence, racist stereotypes; oppression, the demeaning of black beauty as well as the effect of racism and patriarchy on black women's life.

Black women had been unjustly prevented from living freely. They kept down and silenced in a racist society where they were burdened with psychological and physical weight. Because they were positioned in a complicated relationship between sexism and racism, black women had few or nearly no options to support their life and existence. Bell Hooks examines the relationship between these two destroying institutions, “racism and patriarchy are not two separate institutions that intersect only in the lives of Black women. They are mutually

supporting systems of domination and their relationship is essential to understanding the subordination of all women” (Hooks,3) According to this analysis, Black females are considered to be doubly colonized and the jeopardy they were exposed to is doubled as well.

Many Black feminists analyse the oppressed status of the black female. Writers like Angela Davis, Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Patricia Hill Collins and Deborah King, “theorized that black women’s lives are coloured by interlocking oppressions that are bounded by patriarchy, racism” (72). Pointing the finger at the core of the problem would not save black females from this quagmire unless black females they challenge and break the silence. Hook believes, “now it is time to write about who really the coloured women are and hope to become” (Torabi and Ghasemi 123). Writing about the desired identity gives hope and a chance to those submissive women who gave up to these unfair institutions. In fact, this ultimately strengthened and reinforced their self-determination and confidence.

Family is the basic important institution in a society where black females are contextualized in their suitable roles and attitudes. In addition, it determines others behaviors and attitudes toward the black females themselves. If family is deconstructed because of racism and patriarchy, the black female position is destroyed as well. So, family and relationships are designed according to the society type. Thus Black feminist writers give such a great importance to this relevant theme, “black feminist writers have turned their attention increasingly to the family, broadly defined, as a site at which black women and children suffer the varied and conjoined effects of racist and patriarchal exploitation” (Valerie, 205).

The way black females perceive themselves affects the way they act and interact in the society. Moreover, self-definition and self-perception decides how people treat and perceive them. Thus, they cannot enhance their situation and get rid of oppression without creating new perception and new spirit for themselves. Collins 1990 advances, “Black feminist thought cannot challenge intersecting oppressions without empowering African-American women. Because self-definition is key to individual group and empowerment” (Collins,36). Indeed, this new spirit can only be achieved if black female reconciles with themselves and their hurtful past, Hooks notes, “oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subjects, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story” (Hooks, 254).

Maria Stewart was one of the first black Feminist lecturer on political issues. She was dissatisfied with the reality of the life of a black woman. She urged black women to forge self-definitions of self-reliance and independence. To Stewart, “the power of self-definition

was essential, for black women's survival was at stake (38). Stewart asked them to seek their rights and revolt against the limited role they used to perform, especially as mothers. She also challenged black women to use their special roles especially as mothers to forge powerful mechanisms of political action.

Black feminist writers stress on describing and embodying the terrible sexual experiences that the black female had. She was assaulted and harassed twice by white and black males. The aftermath of such incidents can be destructive especially to her sense of identity. When all the events that happened in her life are related to her body, the African-American perspective toward herself is generally affected negatively. Sexual violence presents a huge part from her miserable experiences, "Black feminist writing provides an incisive critical perspective on sexual political issues that affect Black women- for example, the issue of sexual violence" (Warhol & Hrndl ,786).

The black female had been denied from all rights and privileges during the past years. She was never asked when it came to her body. Because even after slavery, the African American women's body still a property that is owned by any male regarding his race, white or black. Being easily accessed, led to labelling and stereotyping her with bad and denigrating images such as, slut, whore, snag, mummies, jezebels and emasculating sapphires. Collins writes, "Black feminist theory argues that African American women in the United States have been violently positioned as the "objectified other" (Auletto & Sableski,272) .

No one gave the Black female excuses or even tried to know why she was easily accessed. As mentioned above, the black female lost the sense of her body; she became submissive and rather subjugated to these bad images. She somewhat saw herself from this demeaning perspective. As a result, Black feminist writers shed light on that danger that threatened and shook the black female identity. For example, many of Toni Morrison's novels addressed and tackled that main point to clarify and uncover the reality of the sexual abuse the black female was exposed to. She further questions black-women's self-identity, self-concept, and struggles to achieve freedom. In the case of Toni Morrison's characters, the trauma in question is slavery, not only as an institution or even an experience, but as a collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded the identity-formation of a people" (Eyerman 1). Beginning with the publication of *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973) and *Song of Solomon* (1977); to her fifth novel, the neo-slave narrative *Beloved* (1987) became arguably the most influential work of Afro-American literature of the late 20th century. One of the central issues that are being opened in that novel is the story of an escaped slave's recovery of her black identity, *Beloved* is also very much a story of mothers and daughters. *Morrison's*

Beloved indicates the story by underlying the historical paradigm of Afro American women. Thus a new understanding sprang which marks the growing of new African American female identity. Lorde explains, “The differential treatment these women endure transcends sexual orientation, and ultimately gives rise to African American women’s self-defined point” (Auletto & Sableski 272).

Another crucial factor that influences the black female negatively is being unable to love herself. The white domineering system and its controlling values devalue the black beauty and physical appearance of the black women. Hence, feelings of ugliness and insecurity are generated by African American women. Black feminist writers glorifies their blackness and their distinct beauty by describing themselves in a new stunning way,

“one of the profound liberating effects of the rise in black feminist literature is the ability of African American women writers to reconstruct the beauty norm for black females outside the dominant controlling images of white beauty standards” (Beaulieu, 51).

To sum up, the twentieth century was a very exciting time for female novelist. Female writers have been around for as long as literature has existed. Women ' s literature was unique because it was the first time since the beginning of female writings that feminism tackled issues related to her gender that were considered controversial like the search for a liberated feminine identity for African American women. Black feminist literature showed the prominent position of the African-American woman that has reached women ' s identity and their independence .

II.4 Conclusion

While the first chapter was about the possible events that led to the appearance of the sub-literary genre« neo-slave narratives » such as; the civil right movements and the black power movements and how it evolved, the second chapter consisted of different issues which black writers treated in their narratives such as black female identity. It also aimed at clarifying the role of black women movement in forming black identity. The theme of black female identity is going to be further explored in one of America’s most famous novels *Beloved* 1987, and the core of this research paper’s key chapter. In the next chapter, we will discover the possibilities for the female characters Sethe, Beloved and Denver in the realization of their individual identity against the racist patriarchal society.

Chapter Three

Beloved: A Textual Study

III. Introduction

Among the African American novels that have tackled the issues of identity is Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). This contemporary novel that is known as a neo-slave narratives shows several ways in which slavery, which was the most oppressive period in the Blacks' history, has affected the black female identity of African American. The novel tells the story of an African-origin community in 1800s Ohio, set after the Civil War. Morrison started writing this novel during a famous movement called "black is beautiful"¹.

This chapter will be devoted to a biography about the author and an overview of the book 'Beloved'. Then a summary for the story followed by the major themes that are tackled in the novel, in addition to that it will explain the issue of black female identity on the female characters' Sethe, Beloved and Denver.

III.1 Biography of Toni Morrison

Toni Morrison, a Nobel Prize- winning author, was born on February 18, 1931, in Lorraine, Ohio, United States. Her original name is Chloe Ardelia Wofford, but for the literary world she is known as Toni Morrison. She grew up in a black family consisting of George Wofford, Ramah, and three brothers. Since her childhood she has been delighted to read the stories taken from the African-American tradition due to her family. Later she became an element in her own writing.

Toni Morrison was fond of literature. She attended several universities, including Howard University in Washington D.C in 1949. She wrote her master thesis on the works of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner. Morrison started her academic career teaching English at Texas Southern University in Houston. She taught writing at Howard from 1957 to 1964. In 1965, she taught writing at the State University of New York at Albany. Then, she taught other writers through editorial support in 1967. Later on, she joined the faculty of Princeton University in 1989.

Morrison started her writing career from Howard university and published her first work of fiction '*The Bluest Eye*' in 1970. It was a short story about an African-American adolescent named Pecola Breed who believes her incredibly difficult life would be better if only she had blue eyes. She continued to explore the African American experience in its many forms and eras in her work. Her second novel, '*Sula*' (1973) explores good and evil through

² Black is beautiful is a cultural movement that was started in the United States of America in the 1960s by African Americans. It later spread beyond the United States. It aims to dispel the notion in many cultures that black people's natural features such as skin color, facial features and hair are inherently ugly. <https://http25048.wordpress.com/2017/02/15/black-is-beautiful-movement-history/>

the friendship of two women. *Sula* was nominated for the American Book Award. She continued to write her engaging attractive works gradually garnered including ‘*Song of Solomon*’ (1977), ‘*Tar Baby*’ (1981), ‘*Beloved* (1987)’, ‘*Jazz*’ (1992), ‘*Love*’ (2003), ‘*A Mercy*’ (2008) and ‘*God Help the Child*’ (2015). In addition, she wrote essays that were published with her speeches as well as children's books.

Most of Morrison’s work revolves around African-Americans history especially on the experiences of black women ; both their history and their situation in the current century. The lives of black females were worthy of attention, Morrison devoted her literary works to addressing their difficult issues and therefore paved the way for an entire generation of African American female writers to touch on such sensitive themes. Toni Morrison became the first Black woman who won the Nobel Prize and Pulitzer Prize for her novels. Her novels are known for their epic themes, vivid dialogues and rich detailed black characters.

III.2 An Overview of *Beloved* (1987)

Beginning with the title which implies love, *Beloved* is Toni Morrison’s fifth book, first published in 1987 and won of the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for fiction . The novel begins years after slavery was abolished. It was inspired by the real-life actions of Margaret Garner; one of the enslaved women who preferred to suffocate their babies rather than allow them to be offered up to destruction by slavery. Throughout her master piece *Beloved* , she shows the sincere destructive legacy of slavery, a part of her life, free of the cuffs of slavery, but how she was still affected by some realistic nightmares attached to slavery and its probable effects on black women.

Toni Morrison leads the reader to become more aware of the destiny of millions of African American people, how blacks were perceived, used and treated by the American population. Morrison sheds light on the throbbing past of African Americans and exposes the hidden experiences for a better accepting of African American history." *Beloved*" is considered among the best works in African American fiction. It is an extraordinary piece of literary art because it is a voice to the denied African American people especially women. Morrison breaks their silence and makes their events visible to the readers.

III.3 Plot Summary

Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* tells a heart-wrenching story about what African slaves had to endure in America. Morrison portrays the African Americans community of Cincinnati, Ohio and focuses on the female character and protagonist Sethe. Sethe is a former slave and a mother of four children . She

lived a miserable life in the plantation 'Sweet Home' under the brutality of the schoolteacher who has been blamed for all kind of sexual and physical violence in addition to her abandonment in husband in the most difficult circumstances. During her journey to escape bondage from Cincinnati, wishing to build a new life for herself with her family, her dream was not fulfilled when her master catches her again. Sethe's fear from bondage of slavery led him to kill her children. Within the novel, she ends up killing her two-year old baby girl 'Beloved' by cutting their throats.

Later on, when Sethe settled in Ohio, she lived with her mother-in law Baby Suggs and her children: Denver, Howard, and Buglar. Sethe was rejected by the society because of what she did to her baby. The same baby girl comes back to Sethe's life as a ghost and starts haunting her mother. She lived a very sad life as her two boys ran away from the house and then Baby Suggs dies. Sethe remains alone with Denver. Then, a man called Paul D Garner, an former slave who also worked on Sweet Home, had a hard life too, a life of oppression. Sethe and Paul D build-up a relationship together. But that didn't last long, the same girl ghost comes back to mother's life by the name "Beloved". Beloved is a more mysterious character, no one knows who she is or where she comes from. The novel becomes even more interesting, it goes on to where Sethe and Beloved build this relationship between each other, Denver and Paul D end up leaving the house when they know that a ghost is the soul of a dead girl. Sethe becomes alone with the ghost and starts to shrink after knowing that the ghost is the soul of her deceased daughter. Beloved starts to get stronger and better. Beloved ends up leaving Sethe alone when a woman from the town heard about the story of the ghost, the ghost caused Sethe's health problems. She was exhausted after Beloved's adventure. Later on Paul D and Denver went back with Sethe and returned to live in her house. He tried to persuade her that she is the best of her own, and not Beloved. Sethe is convinced that, whatever the past is ruthless, there is still a chance of a better life in the future.

III.4 Major Themes in *Beloved*

III.4.1 Slavery in *Beloved*

The whole novel, from the start, is wrapped on the brutal reality of slavery, and depicts its aftermath on slaves. *Beloved* is based on true events from African American history that begins with an heinous crime and concludes with a new period of healing. Toni Morrison is amongst the black women writers of neo-slave narratives who attempted to explain what it means to live as slave and what destructions have been brought to lives of slaves. She insists on the physically, mental and psychological special effects that slavery could impose on an

African American women and how these effects move between the past and the present. Henderson comments that Morrison was one of the most writers who dedicated her literary career to explain what happened to African Americans during the Reconstruction Period :

“Yet, in many respects, these writers were limited in their efforts to fully depict the physical and psychological suffering of African American people...Toni Morrison seeks to signify on those silences imposed by publishers and editors of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In particular, Williams and Morrison extend the efforts of their predecessors by developing creative responses to those calls centered on the wounds of the African American body”. (Henderson,12)

Morrison revisits slavery and its aftermaths in *Beloved* and does not only point out its atrocities, but she also indicates in what way the former slaves tried to create a community for themselves or how they attempted to reintegrate the existing social structures that were accessible to them. Her writing illuminates the fact that female African Americans do not only suffer from the double-consciousness, but she also points out the fact that women are even more inhibited by the restrictions laid upon them by society, *“Being black, the African women suffered from racism; being females they were the victims of sexual atrocities at the hands of the white patriarchs as well as the blacks and being former slaves, the white establishment forced them to live on meagre resources and were compelled to remain poor.”* (Morrison,420)

It seems clear that Morrison lends a gateway to understanding the painful and forgotten tribulations of slavery that continues to haunt the characters who are former slaves even in freedom. Morrison devoted her literary work to make people memorize slavery which present in this novel. In one conversation she states that *“there is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there’s a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive. The act of writing the book, in a way, is a way of confronting it and making it possible to remember“* (Darling,247- 248). By creating the fictive neo-slave narratives, Morrison wanted to give the silent black voice a platform to finally speak of the injustices suffered for so many years.

Margret Garner’s story is one of the most that needs to be given a voice to be heard. Morrison revealed through it the atrocities of slavery that have been silenced in the earlier Black women’s writings.

III.4.2 Matherhood in *Beloved*

Motherhood is among the various emotional and practical areas that *Beloved* explores, Its emotional intensity dominates and overwhelms every other aspect in the entire novel. Specifically, it is a book about Sethe, the slave woman as mother. Morrison's authorship elucidates the power of a mother's love and how it becomes dangerous when mixed with desperation. Bondage system did not allow mothers the opportunity and freedom to nurture their children or perform their role as caregivers and mothers to their children, and especially their female children, had very debilitating consequences on the psyche of the women. In the novel, Sethe does not get an opportunity to be loved by her mother. It is because African-American mothers were not allowed to breastfeed their kids during slavery. Another character Baby Suggs, too, does not give motherly love to her children. Also, *Beloved's* mother undergoes a torturous journey in order to reconstruct the meaning of her life as a woman and mother. After winning freedom, she becomes a true mother to her children even to the ghost of *Beloved*, Sethe showers motherly love which they were denied in the past. Sethe tries to be a good mother to show every mother carry same love. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is a novel by a woman, about women, which mobilizes the narrative form of heroism in the African American fictional world.

III.4.3 Black Female Identity in *Beloved*

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) is a modern day rendition of the nineteenth-century genre of the neo-slave narratives. This fictionalized narrative deals with the lives of African American women in the second half of nineteenth century. Morrison shows several ways in which slavery, the most oppressive period in the black history, has affected the identity of Afro-American women.

In her literary writing, Morrison exposes how African Americans lost their original names upon their arrival in America Plantations. Thus, white masters practised their authority over their slaves by replacing their original names to masters' identities in order to reinforce oppression and ownership. For instance, in *Beloved*, Paul A Garner, Paul F Garner and Paul D Garner are brothers who bear their owner's surname, "Garner". They have the same names but for differentiation sake, their first names are followed by different letters for each of them. This perversion creates "a loss of connection with their ancestry" (Beaulieu,171). It also causes a difficulty in establishing their own culture during the period of slavery. Toni Morrison believes that the black female identity has been built on the horrors of the past and it is this history that has fashioned contemporary black culture in a positive way.

Moreover, Morrison believes that names have the power to create an identity. Considering the slaves in *Beloved*, freedom from slavery includes “giving themselves back to themselves by process of reclaiming and naming” (Madden,9). In addition, Baby Suggs is another character who believes that absolute freedom needs to be accompanied with an exchange of a slave name for a name that bespeaks or expresses a liberated self. When she gains freedom and Mr. Garner is taking her to the Bodwins, the subject of her name comes up in a conversation:

Mr. Garner, she said, why you all call me Jenny? Cause that what's on your sales ticket, gal. Ain't that your name? What you call yourself? Nothing, she said. I don't call myself nothing. Mr. Garner went red with laughter. When I took you out of Carolina, Whitlow called ou Jenny and Jenny Whitlow is what his bill said. Didn't he call you journey? (174-175).

According to this quote, It turns out that Baby Suggs refuses to change her name and insists that she must bear the name that her former husband gave her because the sign of true liberation came from her name change. Mphande 2006 reckons that “*renaming among African Americans started at the very dawn of American history*” (5). This means that act of renaming facilitated the process of searching for black identity. Since the publication of Morrison's novel in 1987, the black identity of *Beloved* has confused the readers. Many researchers suppose that *Beloved* can be the spirit of Sethe's murdered daughter or a human woman who is mentally unstable. This interpretations of *Beloved*'s identity expose the difficulty of Morrison's character. Not only is she read differently by diverse characters in the novel but also by different readers of the novel. Morrison introduces *Beloved* as a magical realist instrument , by reminding Sethe and other ex-slaves of their past, ultimately helps them reassert their identity, by healing the drift between her and the black community, also enables them to form their communal identity. The theoreticians and practitioners of magical realism also emphasize the important role of community. Faris and Zamora (1995) write, magical realist texts “may encode the strengths of communities even more than the struggle of individuals. Societies, rather than personalities, tend to rise and fall in magical realist fiction” (Faris and Zamora,10). Morrison focused mainly on a marginalized community and their struggle against white supremacy. She described the communal unity during slavery as responded to the modern world not only as individuals but also as a group, a community. “The black women, gathered in front of 124, transform themselves by the sound of their singing into a powerful black church that liberates Denver and Sethe from the oppressive

spiritual presence of Beloved” (Lobodziec;116). All these events emphasize the importance of community in the novel. Morrison creates a bridge between communal and individual memories through the magical realist device of a ghost named Beloved ,who is the embodiment of collective memories of black community and who, by reminding Sethe, Paul D, Baby Suggs, and other people of the black community of their past. Beloved creates a bond with the characters through the memories of the traumatic experiences of slavery and forces them to face the historical past. Morrison uses the magical realism to rewrite the history of black women from their own perspectives in order to convey the real which has so long been ignored and to form an identity through slavery. In her fictional novel, Morrison shows the way that black female identity could be constructed through her own cultural heritage and social structure. She makes a connection between history and personal and cultural memories. In this sense, healing of memories and forgetting the painful past is the first step needed to self-identification and build new life.

III.4.3.1 Black Identity Construction of Female Characters in *Beloved*

III.4.3.1.1. Sethe’s Quest for Identity

Sethe’s background limits her actual thinking and understanding of things. She is never going to pass on her bad memories. She is the most oppressed character in the novel , she is not haunted only by the ghost of her baby girl but also by the memories of her life as a slave,

I was about to turn around and keep on my way to where the muslin was, when I heard him say, "No, no. that’s not the way. I told you to put her human characteristics on the left; her animal ones on the right. And don’t forget to line them up". I commenced to walk backward, didn’t even look behind me to find out where I was headed (Morrison,137).

Injustice and inhumanity were the principles of the slave owners. Both male and female slaves were considered as nonhumans. Sethe has been scarred by the physical brutality of schoolteacher's nephews, The masters imposed their rules, forced them to work as much as possible and beat him until they formed a kind of tree in her back. Sethe’s body full of scars and wounds show the frightening experience of the past, both physically and psychologically. Sethe’s body is not the suitable place, where identity could be recognized in a positive way; "One of the aspects of slavery which resulted in negative effects on the slaves’ self image was

the fact that they were sold. Slaves were regarded as not being human; they were products with a price"(Wising5). Sethe's past full of misery and cruelty shapes her life to the extent that she is not able to recover her identity; she loses her personality. Although the protagonist of *Beloved* was deprived of the mother's tenderness, she is motherly instinctive and this stands as are her most striking characteristic. As her hatred of slavery caused crimes against her children rather than allow them to encounter even a portion of her painful experiences. In Sethe's mind, killing her children to protect them from a life of servitude and despair is the ultimate expression of a mother's love.

Identity can be formed by the family, the society, and by the environment, but Sethe could not have an identity because she was separated from her mother, then neglected by the society, and the most important aspect is the environment where she lived, due to her horrible act of cutting the throat of her daughter made her community doubt her maternal feelings. In general, Beloved's role in formulation of Sethe's identity is absolutely crucial in the novel. Beloved is a powerful symbol of the link between the present and the past. Sethe's identity is formulated with connection to her past which she obtains through the ghost of Beloved.

Within the novel, one can conclude that Sethe's Children represent her identity. She had babies and did her best to keep them safe so she is a human. Especially, Beloved's role in formulation of Sethe's identity. Beloved is not only the spirit of Sethe's dead child, but also a symbol of rememory and the link between Sethe's past and present. Whereas her identity is formulated with the connection to her past which she obtains through the ghost of Beloved. Although Beloved does not belong to the present nor the past, she happens to be a link between the present and the past. Therefore, Sethe's and Denver's lives are connected with the past that is impersonated in Beloved. With the arrival of Beloved, Sethe's wounds caused by slavery are open again. This shows the influence Beloved has over Sethe and Denver. In order to heal these wounds as Piotrowska confirms, "black people have to learn to forget and leave the harmful experience behind" (17). Beloved is thus also understood as a symbol of pain Sethe has experienced in slavery.

III.4.3.1.2 Beloved's Quest for Identity

Beloved is the star of the whole novel that impersonated as a ghost, the unnamed masses. She symbolises the affliction and guilt of the past and at the same time, the power and beauty of the future. Beloved's identity is mysterious, she can be the spirit of Sethe's murdered daughter or a human woman who is mentally unstable. Beloved lost her life when her mother cut her throat, but she is restored when it appears again as a ghost. In this sense, Pamela B.

June claims that ; "Most obviously, Beloved's scar on her neck reveals her identity as the daughter murdered by Sethe"(24). For Sethe, Beloved had never died, she believed that she was always with her. She gave her an identity through her thoughts; Beloved had always been alive in the memories of her mother; "The "click" is something recalled because Sethe had already pre-created Beloved as well as her place in the world, and only now when she no longer has even to speak words can the join truly begin"(Marks,93). It is clear that Sethe was the responsible of Beloved coming back to life. Beloved felt that her mother missed her, so she decided to come back.

Through Beloved's return, she is manifesting her identity and her existence; " Beloved's return first as a spirit and then as a body indicates the continuing physical presence of historical wounds, but it also emphasizes the body's role in identity and recognition"(June 30). One can understand that Beloved was not satisfied by her spiritual presence, she wanted to regain her identity and to do so she came back as a body.

III.4.3.1.3 Denver's Quest for Identity

It is evident that Denver did not live during slavery's period, but she experienced it through the eyes of her mother. She represents the African American hope for the future. She is shy, intelligent, and sensitive but her innocence is destroyed when she discovers what Sethe did to her sister and planned to do to her as well. After the loss of her grandmother and her brothers running away, Denver stood alone. Even children of the community refused to play with her. This environment caused her a mental illness; she suffered from loneliness ; "Because their house is haunted by the spirit of Beloved, before she returns, no children have ever dared to seek closeness with Denver. Such solitude can cause severe psychological damage, and Denver struggles to find a sense of meaning and purpose in her life"(Larrick,3).

Because of this isolation from the outside world, Denver decided to go out and ask for help; "Denver knew it was on her. She would have to leave the yard; step off the edge of the world, leave the two behind and go ask somebody for help" (170). She recognizes that the family's survival rests upon her shoulders. Finally, the charmed girl decides to begin her own life. "Waiting for me. Tired from her long journey back. Ready to be taken care of; ready for me to protect her. This time I have to keep my mother away from her. That's hard, but I have to. It's all on me"(146). Denver wanted to make a new beginning, starting from keeping her mother away from danger. It is clear that she wants to make a new starting and to build a new identity far from fear and loneliness "She ventures out into the world and learns to get along and communicate with her community. She becomes a more confident and strong

woman"(Gillespie 38). One can argue that Denver created her identity through her self-confidence and imposing her personality on her community.

III.6 Conclusion

Toni Morrison in her novels provides a very detailed description of the different experiences of the African American females who have been in search for their identity. She deals with multiple oppression that contributes to the identity formation of the African Americans, in general. She explores African American identity by a process of going deeper into the main characters' past. For instance, Morrison here shows that Sethe will not be able to search their identity without the help of the community. Parents are an important part of identity, their absence can be seen as the absence of their roots. It is apparent that their traumatic past lives, uprootedness and their repressed memories influence their search for identity.

This chapter is entitled ;, *Beloved: A textual study* it is divided into four main parts. The first point introduces a biography about the author-Toni Morrison – her life and her major contribution to Afro-American literature. The second part is concerned with an overview of the book *Beloved* 1987 .The third includes plot summary, followed by the major themes that are exposed in the novel. The last point is about how female characters in *Beloved* constructed their black identity.

General Conclusion

Toni Morrison is one of those African American contemporary writers who always succeeded in depicting all the pain and the overwhelming experiences that black female endured during slavery. In her neo-slave narratives, Morrison focuses mainly on the oppression and white supremacy upon black Americans. This study takes *Beloved* as an example. Morrison concentrates on black female characters who suffer more in a racial oriented system.

Black female identity is major theme that Morrison analysed in her novel *Beloved*. She used this concept as an issue that confronted the Afro-Americans in their lives. Morrison, through three black female characters, succeeded in portraying this issue as problem in society where the others do not accept black females as full members of their community. This research has studied the factors that led the African American, mainly females, during contemporary period and how the latter managed to (re)construct their identity. The present research has followed analytical techniques in order to find what are the reasons that led society reject those people and refuse to recognize them.

Through this analysis, it is apparent that the factors that led the protagonist the black women and other females' characters feel destroyed in society is the idea that whites are superior, and that the whites judge the blacks through white beauty standards. Through the novel, we may notice that the majority of black females are haunted by the ghost always related to whiteness and which reinforces the idea that whites are beautiful and thus visible on the contrary of blacks who are dark but ironically invisible being and women were the ones much exposed to blindness and invisibility in the novel.

These novels were also shaped in an era in which a person, more particularly a black person, and most of all a black woman, did not have to be proven trustworthy by a third, white party. These writers were also clever to see from a modern and past sight of slavery, which may have given their work more depth, and gave them an approach into what is believed about slavery now compared to what actually was.

Through our investigation of the story, it is apparent that black identity, more particularly a black female identity still distorted in the United States of America even and after the abolition of slavery. *Beloved*, a neo-Slave Narratives, a novel published in 1987 has confirmed that. Despite the efforts of black feminists, black females are still feeling discriminated in a white community.

Works Cited

Primary Sources

Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. Vintage International, 2004.

Rushdy, Ashraf H. A. *Neo-slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form*.
New York: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Secondary Sources

Andrews, William L. "Slave Narrative." *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*. Eds. William L.. New York: Oxford UP, 1997.

Andrew, Jennifer "Reading Toni Morrison's Jazz: rewriting the Tall Tale and Playing with Trickster in the White American and African-American Humor Tradition"
Canadian review of American studies 29.1(1999): 87-107.

Arlene R. Keizer. *Black Subjects: Identity Formation in the Contemporary Narrative of Slavery*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2004.

Beaulieu, Elizabeth Ann. *Writing African American Women*. Westport, London, Green Wood Press, 2006.

Bell, Bernard W. *The Afro-American Novel and Its Tradition*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987.

Campbell, Diana Kaye. Rev. of *Black Women Writers and the American Neo-Slave Narrative: Femininity Unfettered*, *Melus* (2001): 244-246. Web. 12 March 2013

Eyerman, Ron. *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*. Eds.

Feagin, Joe R, Hckinney, Karyn D. *The Many Costs of Racism*. Maryland, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003.

Feagin Joe R, Jean, Yanick St. *Boule Burden: Black Women and Everyday Racism*.
Routledge, 2015.

Gaines, Ernest. *The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman*. New York: Dial Press Paperbacks, 2009.

Gillespie, Carmen. *Critical companion to Toni Morrison: A Literary Reference to her Life and Work*. New York: Facts On File, 2008. Print.

Henderson, C. E. (2002). *Scarring the Black Body: Race and Representation in African American Literature*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press.
in 'Beloved'. Terre Haute, Indiana: Indiana State University

Hooks, bell. *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism*. New York: Routledge, 2015.
Jeffrey C. Alexander and Steven Seidman. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print .

- June, Pamela B. *The Fragmented Female Body and Identity : The Postmodern, Feminist, and Multiethnic Writings of Toni Morrison, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Phyllis Alesia*
- Judith Kegan Gardiner "On Female Identity and Writing by Women" *Critical Inquiry*,8,no(1981) 353-354.
- Jennifer, F. (1996). *Mastering Slavery : Memory, Family, and Identity in Women's Slave Narratives*. New York, New York: New York University Press
- Levecq, Christine. "Texts and Contexts: The Historical Novel about Slavery." Rev. of *Neo-Slave Narratives: Studies in the Social Logic of a Literary Form*, by Ashraf H.A.
- Marks, Kathleen. *Toni Morrison's Beloved and the Apotropaic Imagination*. University of Missouri Press, 2002.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved* (1987). Talantikit, 2010. Print.
- Munoz-Valdivieso, Sofia. "Neo-Slave Narratives in Cotemporary Black Fiction," *A Review of International English Literature* 42.34 (2012).
- Murphy, Laura T. *Survivors of Slavery: Modern-Day Slave Narratives*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2014.
- Neal, Anthony. *The naming: A conceptualization of an African American Connotative Struggle*. *Journal of Black Studies* September 2001 vol. 32 no. 1. Print. P 50-65.
- Neal, Larry. "The Black Arts Movement". Ed. Hazel Arnett Ervin". *African American Literary Criticism, 1773-2000*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1999.
- Pickwell, E., Cole, G. E., Fitzgerald, A. J., Wallace, V., & Pepper, M. (2004). Simulation of terahertz pulse propagation in biological systems. *Applied Physics Letters*, 84(12), 2190-2192.
- Robinson, Angelo Rich. "Why Does the Slave Ever Love? The Subject of Romance Revisited in the Neoslave Narrative." *The Southern Literary Journal* 40.1 (2007): 39-57. Web.
- Rushdy. *Contemporary Literature* 24.1 (2001): 160-165. Web. 18 Dec. 2012.
- Rushdy, Ashraf H. A. "Neo-slave Narrative." In *The Oxford Companion to African American Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Spaulding, Timothy A. *Re-Forming the Past: History, The Fantastic, and the Postmodern Slave Narrative*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2005. Print
- Tatum, D. "The Complexity of Identity: "Who am I?" Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Toget in the Cfeteria? And Other Conversations About Race." New York: Basis Books, 2003:18–28.

Toni Morrison: *Forty Years in the Clearing*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012.

Wising, Johanna. *Motherhood and the Heritage of Slavery in Toni Morrison's Novels Sula and Beloved*. English C-Course Autumn, 2008.

Zamora, L. P. (1995). *Magical romance/magical realism: Ghosts in U. S. and Latin American fiction*. In L. P. Zamora & W. B. Faris (Eds.), *Magical realism: Theory, history, community* (pp. 497-550). Durham & London: Duke University Press.