

Quest for Cultural Identity in Select Works of Toni Morrison

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Abstract

The leading example of Afro- American novel writer Toni Morrison belonged to an excellent wordsmith, a political worker, a dedicated scholar and an honest humanitarian. Toni Morrison has recently earned the highest appreciations for literary excellence and for her distinguished career as an academic. She is also an economist, a Nobel Prize laureate, and a winner of the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Moreover, she was also awarded with an Honorary Degree of Doctor of Literature from the Universities of Oxford, Rutgers, and Geneva. Toni Morrison's professional resume is both academic and artistic accomplishments, but her enduring accomplishment is her literary legacy. Toni Morrison's writing is completely fluid and impressive. Her novels are excavations of the human psyche by uncovering the basic elements of the humanitarian soul in its cruelest and most dark scenarios. A respected voice of an acclaimed writer such as Toni Morrison can be heard from each beat of her sentences. This critical paper is an intense exploration of search for identity and entity in select novels of Toni Morrison. With this paper an endeavor has been made how the black people; especially the so-called 'other' who are labeled obnoxiously by the superior whites; articulate their voices in the colonized Africa. In this respect of postcolonial discourses no other writer is as copacetic as Toni Morrison in the realm of literature of Black transnational feminism.

Keywords: culture, identity, discrimination, marginalization, black, feminism.

Content

Throughout her vivid depictions, Afro-American writer Toni Morrison has beautifully portrayed the socio-political oppression that African Americans have faced. There are a variety of shifts in people's life due to changing environment. Discrimination of gender roles and economic disparity is something that should be fixed. Women are also heavily oppressed and repressed. The Second wave feminist movement was related to sexism and reduction of exploitation. Black feminism means conscious struggle to free one's people from such repressions and render the voice to the voiceless. The history of black women marginalisation led them to awareness and empowerment by themselves. Toni Morrison argues that women who are black cannot find real empowerment no matter how much they work hard for it. Toni Morrison has taken a serious and playful look at black women's perspectives and their quest for their identities. It is a cultural trauma of the African American women that makes it difficult for them to form the feeling of identity. This critical discussion emphasizes on the question of how a woman should articulate her identity in a racist environment. The protagonist figures of the novels project their personalities within an ethnic, patriarchal society. There was gross discrimination against Afro-Americans in the early periods of the twentieth century. The Civil War ended and it formally ended in 2007. Slavery

was brought to an end because of all of the abolitionist campaigns. As free African-Americans had to reach a higher level of fairness to obtain acceptability, Post 1920, the work of Black writers flourished in Harlem region. Both a literary and a political revolution were happening. The Harlem Renaissance was known as the intellectual and social outburst that took place between the two World Wars. In 1980 and 1990 people witnessed a boom in African American women authors who also written in academia. They had been critical of gender, ethnic and political systems of dominance. On the back of the rise of the Afro-American women, there has been a black women's literary revival in the 1970s.

Morrison continued to write books, including the best-selling *Song of Solomon* (1977) and her book, the slave story *Beloved* (1987). Authors as Toni Morrison, Maya Angelou writer of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* and Alice Walker who wrote *The Color Purple* inspired a new wave of younger black female authors to concentrate on issues of identity. Black women have known the issues of a black woman. The misery of the Palestinian Arabs is repeatedly stated by their efforts. Due to their dual entities, African women were the targets of both ethnic prejudice as well as misogyny.

Toni Morrison's understanding and acceptance of the under current world has led her to produce work which emphasizes the fostering of multicultural and inter-ethnic peace. This young lady's parents were refugees from the Mid-West. She was strongly influenced by society, her departure from and transcendence beyond the American white patriarchal norm as illustrated in her writing. Toni Morrison was born in the state of Ohio to parents who moved from the South. Morrison's storytelling and music played a strong role in cultivating her creative talents. She heard about the lives of her forefathers from her parents' and grandparents' stories. Morrison's parents raised an artistically gifted child. Morrison was a talented and professional scholar who was accustomed to great academic achievements. She studied English and Classics. After finishing her studies, she received her master's degree at Cornell University. Morrison's working life will revolve around academics.

Many African-American people in Morrison's novels frequently strive to change their life by accepting the white American culture or by rejecting their own black identity. In this critical discourse, I will discuss multiple characters who have opinions about America's imperialistic existence. Of course, this comes with conversations about cultures and history. What approach can we take in addressing the issue of refugees? If the main characters decide to avoid being proponents of Western culture are they unrealistic idealists, or are they betraying their own culture? And I think there are some negotiating factors between the two sides.

The books of Morrison are concerned with the political and societal order. How dwelling places form the personalities of the main characters of Yvonne is a big theme of her novels. To suggest her books challenge the creation of identity is an accurate statement. A core issue is whether the lives of African American characters should be affected by their white culture. Any of her characters struggle to stand out from the crowd. They build odd or peculiar buildings. They tend not to be proper dress in western culture. Some of the women these days opt to have hair-free ears. In this way, they transform rooms into bedrooms. They wore flashy and elegant African-American clothes at the awards night. Characters respond by giving in to or fighting to preserve their heritage, history, and character.

Some of the characters struggle to exert a bit of control over their own lives by using items like cans of food. These tiny artifacts are all the characters' aspirations for cultural sovereignty as well as being the

talismans and helping them identify themselves and their frustration in something concrete. The factors present change.

So does several of the characters in the narratives. These angry characters turn on each other and get at each other's throats inside their own African-American societies. This is one of the contributing factors of frustration leading to aggression. Morrison argues that this repressed resentment and frustration should be directed towards the white society that is suppressing the Afro-American ethno-culture.

Some of her characters are not only surviving but seemed to prosper in the narratives. The characters make the best cultural concessions. These African-American actors live feet in for both Black and American culture and the Caucasian realm. Somewhat of middle ground exist between the two extremes with the characters in the novels. They are the people who are promoted in the novels because they excel in the opportunities that exist. Morrison appears to be very bullish about the significance of African-American cultural heritage and she seems to be asserting that these people are going to be important in the culture's future.

Some of the characters in her stories are in a state of in-betweenness. Her characters' personalities are associated with the dominant society. Culture-specific homes and dresses are counterproductive to personal development because they obstruct an individual's spiritual and emotional freedoms. Helen's house in *Sula* is a perfect and good example. The house is very beautiful and immaculate: it is still very tidy and clean. This house is full of order. This is not at all a "funky" home. Morrison's characters use the word "funkier" to describe someone who is very different from the social expectations of whites.

As a result of her novels, Morrison believes that owning a property and being respectable is of no particular benefit. Some of her novels indicate that dominant white culture pushes its subjects to purchase things in order to fit in the society. This dominant culture commodifies individuals by selling them to the other people as products. Rather than Morrison's characters simply owning goods which are produced by a white culture, the culture owns them by programming and promotes indebtedness. Individuals become oppressed by the system's philosophy—the concept which declares that people should accept business goods or items to belong to the particular group. And these are similar to those in debt because of repaying the debtors, including debtors.

The characters' inability to comprehend the value of their own life is compounded by the fact that they live in accordance with a broader cultural heritage. The characters know how to turn their eyes and seek approval from the "Other" to feel good about themselves. These characters drive around searching for goals in the external world.

Morrison's characters live rootless lives with temporary shelter because many of them have no income. It should be stressed that the characters frequently disregard their native socio-cultural root whereas embracing the broader white society. They choose to self-sabotage so that they are recognised as African-Americans in the broader community as a means of fitting in. Her novels teach us to understand the inherent value of cultural and religious identity.

Some of these rootless characters are beyond or outside all cultures. They are in the center of two communities, the coloured and white world. Alice's world has more possibilities in her life. They do not

view their situations like this. As Homi K. Bhabha discussed in the *Location of Culture*, this reflects an understanding of the subject role that occupy every claim to identity in the modern world (such as ethnicity, gender, age, institutional location, geopolitical locality, sexual orientation) (2). This is the status of individuals within the social community. This shows that Bhabha and I have something in common—a diverse attitude toward social values. If understood correctly, this liminal existence will create a more inclusive community and create more change in society. If white society's gospel truths remain outside the singularities, one is not constrained by its meanings. Liminality contributes significantly to our desire to behave beyond dominant cultural norms. However, those resident in that community are enslaved by it. People have the freedom to build a fresh entity in a modern society by themselves.

While Morrison argues that these attachments are actually negative for her characters because it represents a broader community. In Morrison's literature, her characters frequently live in dangerous and oppressive places. Morrison argues that we place so much emphasis on material things, including the homes, which is unhealthy. This phenomenon is relevant particularly for any object built and produced by dominant culture and used by black culture. Elizabeth B. House argues that these places are the healthiest spots where women flourish beyond the oppressive violences of masculine culture, and I dispute her position by asserting that these houses act as sites of containment. These fences would keep women within the boundaries of their proper borders. Designed by the masculine white forces, such colonial style houses also split women from the men.

True freedom is thinking for oneself and enjoying an individual's personal life. In *Beloved* there are Baby Suggs and Denver who are unconstrained of consumption. Baby Suggs, an African American teacher, makes recommendations to individuals about self-love. "Here," she said, "in this here place, we flesh; flesh that weeps, laughs; flesh that dances on bare feet in grass. Love it. Love it hard. Yonder they do not love your flesh. They despise it. ...This is flesh I'm talking about here. Flesh that needs to be loved" (*Beloved* 108). The Clearing is a place, here Baby Suggs gives preaching to the crowd and inspires her own culture to rise up in revolt. Having had her roots cut away in this world of nature. Sethe is able to assert her own identity as a human, as an individual. Darcy didn't describe her life by what she was not: the privileged member of the capitalist group, but indeed by what she was: an Afro-American hipster lady. The women who are self-accepted are also oppressed by their race. They are not playing by the law as they discriminate against the minorities. They tend not to be white. The characters who flourish when living in a society contrary to the superior race are disrespected by their own people and branded as sinner. Baby Suggs has been one more instance of unconventional woman. Baby Suggs had a food feast to feed the world, but the community shunned her.

In regards to its importance, Baby Suggs may seem undirected, though its meaning is unquestionable. Baby Suggs helps the people of her class to build their individual self-concepts by loving themselves. Baby Suggs has the duty of bringing the world together and inspiring them to respect them. This celebration of dark skin angers the community because it is still the focus of attention. There's a massive movement out there that regards us as subversives, racists, and fools who are oblivious to whiteness, humanity, and culture. The people of Luton 124 are being punished because they created their own identities and resisted the cultural imposition faced by the black community. The culture resents Michelle's family because they are people rather than ethnic lemmings.

The desire for a beautiful, decent home, and the embrace this offers, is too strong that the incapability in owning it will, like the incapability in owning blue pair of eyes, destroy black status. The novelist supports leaving wide variety of human emotions unpolished and unregulated. Black men like in Morrison's *Beloved* search out their African-American imagination and they kill it. Wherever it spills in, they sweep it up; wherever it starts to scale, they spoil it. They kill African-American culture in their house to be absorbed into white culture because they are afraid of racism. There is some underlying angst and resentment in Morrison's tone as she deliberately is belittling the rich young women. These repressed women appear in *The Bluest Eye* who lived in calm African neighborhood. Here each person was advantageously working. Here there was porch swings hanged from chain. Here the grasses were cut with blades, here male chicken combed and sunflower growed in the yard. The women had bought watermelons and beans from the fruit-man's wagon. The women were not irritable, afraid, and piercing. The eyes of such women were not aggressive.

These Afro-American girls are not liberated from ancient rituals. They bathe, cleanse, and moisturize themselves before looking in the mirror. They smell of tree bark, wood, and coconut. Though these women lived in safe black suburban communities, they were still betraying their race. The narrator has told us that such young lasses went on to teach these African babies how to obey. They promote that Afro-Americans ought to be culturally white, and not funky or special. Morrison's novels throw light on what the impact of blackness is on whites by introducing black characters and scenarios that illustrate the ridiculousness of blackness. Often her novels against such hateful philosophies from one African-American woman portraying another African-American are a bigot targeting another African-American woman. The reflective self-loathing of the African-American characters is understandable to the reader. Thus in the novel *The Bluest Eye*, the distinction between black and coloured was not always visible. Subtle and telltale signals at the risk of developing into something big. Black culture placed too much focus on the physical appearance due to long term threat from men of colour and government behavior and policies.

In *Sula*, Toni Morrison creates the first definitively transgressive African-American home dweller in her oeuvre. One very significant figure, Eva Harmony, ignores social customs. This is an act of defiance against those who want to make her feel ashamed because she is different. Helene Sabat is a decent person depicted in novel of Morrison. Sabat works to be considered as obedient to the British people that are such issues which the novelist's book decries. Although born of a Creole prostitute in an area of brothels having scarlet shutters, Helene Sabat was rescued from the uncouth Afro-American society. For that she was indebted to her grandmother who was set on grooming her into a decent young black woman. Therefore, her grandmother shielded her against the wild blood of her mother. However, the mother, a prostitute, was portrayed by the novelist to be a sizzling, attractive, and open minded woman, a person of veneration/respect for the little Nel. She was the child of Helen Wright. Sabat is lauded due to her good conduct to be rewarded with an enchanting home. The Helene project is a picture of admiration for many of the Afro-Americans in the novels of Morrison, and well-groomed people come from respectable communities. It must not go unnoticed that Helen Sabat lives in the place instead of the mountain in the city named Medallion which is populated by whites.

In *Paradise* of Toni Morrison the whole city of Ruby is set up in the picture of British towns which have ostracized the black residents. Since fleeing from an oppressive society, the characters establish a racist locality or town of their own. There are those people who are pure, tidy, and one aspect of the scheme and

one such who have an unconventional, messier, wayward status. The greatest as well as divisive women in the novel are the convent women. They are considered disgusting and filthy. These individual women have converted a home built by British people and worked as a Christian school for western nuns in a special platform for woman who does not adjust in the community. Hence such people, therefore, remain without males—which is not considered a proper group in Ruby. Their way of life consists of being bohemian and free spirited. They stay in whichever house they like, remodeling room, they sleep in root cellar, they drink and shave their heads, and they usually adopt a kind of idol worshipping which reminds the readers of many different cultures in the third-world on some distant continents. The people mix different castes to figure out an exclusive religion that fits their culture of women. They have trashed indigenous traditions and replaced them with their own. As some men broke into the convent they found out that each woman slept in a hammock, not in a bed like regular people. They oppose traditional social regulations urging that citizens must stay in sleeping quarters. Women's poverty does not only take form of lack of clean and proper clothing, but also lack of proper wear. These women are psychologically abnormal. They want to be fulfilled and content, not right.

Owing to Toni Morrison becoming the first Afro-American female writer who has won the Nobel Prize for Literature, her popularity has increased throughout the world. While she is renowned for her novels, the works about *Tar Baby* are the least studied and the most criticised. This paper demonstrates that it is Morrison's plan to put her story in various places such as Caribbean, Paris, New York and Elloe. In postcolonial novel, the space strategy puts black characters at-breaking-point to resist fixed identity and quest for mobile or fleeting black cultural identity. Undeniably, these characters and their stories are trying to tell us something from their skewed point of view. When taking the wet-nurse in the singular, this refers to dwindling dependency among communities because of situations like lavishness. But when making both of these stories in contrast, she is tooting the scope of possibilities for African-Americans. These hermaphrodites can be stunning or they can become jobs or prey for white people. The explanation is that black women are the target of racialization and other kinds of oppression. Besides witnessing the contrasting conventional perceptions of women in family, the novel also supports them in various ways. The problem to be dealt with is misogyny, not gender.

Conclusion

To conclude, we can say that the female protagonists making an attempt to adapt to American society caused negative effects. These characters' lives are profoundly influenced by these circumstances in an unpleasant way. No character is genuinely able to survive in an adverse situation. The two ladies' experience pretending to be other person profoundly influences their survivals in society. It is their personal decision that triggers the displeasures with the social standing for a black individual in a society. The search is predominant in the characters' enterprise in enjoying their performance. By the means of seeking, Sula and Jadine endeavor in surviving psychological victimization. Sula and Jadine were released from prison. So they have only partly completed what they began from. They were not happy with their lives and yearned for anything better. The goal was interrupted by societal and colonial forces. It's a way to consume the ideals of the commanding society. The novelist here emphasizes the value of life. The black African women today in a race and caste-ridden world promote a love of their own race, by their own. Toni Morrison's novels are devoid of instances of nostalgia. Andrew is able to celebrate the legacy of the United States in a celebratory manner, while also exposing some of the negative aspects of America's culture, including racism and homophobia. Toni Morrison's novel can be seen as a divisive interwoven story that explores consciousness and memory problems. Ella Fitzgerald runs throughout her

novels with the topical line of the critical and close connections among individuals. Inside the relationships between her characters, there are broader themes surrounding racial inequality and the inhuman processions imposed on Afro-American people. Morrison's synthesis of mythic elements, historical events and fictional components offers a series of persuasive narrative which crosses a sheer reading and demands a deeply intellectual reaction.

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