

## The Psychological Impact of Slavery in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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الأثر النفسي للعبودية في رواية "الحبيبة" لتوني موريسون

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### المخلص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى مناقشة الآثار المؤلمة للعبودية كما تظهر في رواية "الحبيبة" لتوني موريسون. ويهدف إلى معرفة كيف تعكس القصة الآثار طويلة المدى لهذا الانتهاك الجسيم لحقوق الإنسان على هوية الأفراد وعائلاتهم وحالتهم النفسية. يعتمد البحث على منهج مزدوج، إذ يتضمن النقد الأدبي والنظريات النفسية. وتحليل البنية النحوية المتعددة الجوانب للرواية، تعتمد الدراسة على أهم النتائج الواردة في الأدبيات النفسية ذات الصلة التي تتناول عواقب العبودية، وخاصةً في سياق عمل موريسون. وتشير النتائج إلى أن العبودية لا تدمر الفرد في حالة الأسر فحسب، بل تترك أيضًا ندوبًا طويلة الأمد حتى بعد تحرره. تُظهر رواية "الحبيبة" الشخصيات من خلال توضيح كيفية تجلّي صدمة العبودية في حياتهم وهوياتهم وعلاقاتهم الشخصية. يُعدّ التفاعل بين التذكر والصدمة والتعافي أمرًا أساسيًا لإدراك الآثار النفسية للقصة. تضع المناقشة موضوع موريسون، المتمثل في دراسة العبودية، في سياق أكاديمي أوسع، حيث يوجد تفاعل متبادل بين الأدب وعلم النفس في التعامل مع الظلم التاريخي. كما تُصوّر كيف يُمكن استخدام رواية "الحبيبة" لفهم التراث النفسي للعبودية، مع تركيز كبير على سعي الناس المستمر لإعادة تعريف هوياتهم وطبيعتهم البشرية في أعقاب العبودية. باختصار، تُبين الدراسة أهمية رواية "الحبيبة" في تلخيص صدمة العبودية المنقوشة التي لم تقتصر على الماضي فحسب، بل تمتد إلى الحاضر أيضًا. يشجع هذا العمل على إجراء المزيد من التحليلات للأدبيات في سياق علم النفس لفهم العواقب طويلة المدى للمعاملة اللاإنسانية وسبل العودة إلى عملية الشفاء واستعادة الهوية الكلمات المفتاحية: العبودية، النفسية، توني موريسون، الحبيبة.

### Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discuss traumatic effects of slavery as shown in the novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. It aims to find out how the story mirrors the long-term effects of this massive abnormality of human rights on the identity of individuals, their families, and their mental state. The discussion uses a two-fold methodology because it involves literary criticism and psychological theories. Analyzing the multifaceted syntactic format of the novel, the study relies on the most important findings in related psychological literature which covers the consequences of slavery, especially in the situation of the work by Morrison. The results indicate that slavery does not only destroy the individual in the captivity state but it also bears long lasting scars even after being freed. *Beloved* shows the characters with the illustration of the ways trauma of slavery reveals itself in their lives, their identities, and their interpersonal relationships. The interaction of recollection, trauma and recovery is essential to realize the psychological implications in the story. The discussion puts the topic by Morrison of examining slavery into a broader academic context, in which there is a reciprocal interaction between literature and psychology in dealing with historical injustice. It depicts the way *Beloved* can be used to comprehend the psychological heritage of slavery, with a great focus on how people continually seek to redefine their identities and human nature in the aftermath of slavery. In summary, the study relates the relevance of *Beloved* in the summary of the endemic trauma of slavery that was caused not only in the past, but also nowadays. The work encourages the further analysis of the literature pieces in the context of psychology

to have a clearer understanding of the long-term consequences of inhumane treatment and the way to come back to the healing process and identity restoration.

*Keywords: Slavery, Psychological, Toni Morrison, Beloved.*

### **Introduction**

Slavery is a gigantic crime against humanity that virtually implied all the destruction of the sense of oneself: depriving a person of his or her identity, tearing his or her family in pieces, and depriving one of all the fundamental human rights. The restrictive and humiliating impacts of such inhuman treatment happen in both the days of a slave and even after the physical shackles are lifted. This paper will examine the traumatic effects of slavery in the book *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. Due to the intricate nature of the novel, the book is interpreted through the two lenses of literature criticism and psychology. It utilizes the major lessons of the research on the psychological impacts of slavery in the literature and especially in *Beloved*. The novel depicts the very destructive psychological impacts of slavery. It displays these effects as long lasting even after physical freedom is attained. The analysis shows that the memories of the characters concerning slavery and incarceration interfere with their present lives and unveil the mechanisms according to which the limitations and distortions that were imposed on the individual due to slavery could be discovered and restored (Vincelj, 2018). It is the psychological impact of slavery discussed, how this impact manifests itself and is reflected in the novel and the particular means by which people are trying to cope with the traumatic legacies of slavery or to overcome them. The conclusion recalls how *Beloved* by Morrison has led to the discussion of the long term effects of slavery on human identity and psychology. Although as a formal institution, the American slavery system was finally eliminated under the Thirteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution (1865), ideologies and practices that were created as a result of the structural oppression and dehumanization of enslaved people still have a significant impact in the United States. In fact, remnants of the socioeconomic and political structure of the slave era linger in the contemporary American society and widely influence the contemporary discourses of the American identity (Bassi, 2014). The remarkable influence of these cultural and historical trends on the lives of the current American peoples is an indication of the extent of the psychological traumas of slavery in the minds of generations of Americans. Literary scholarship creates a direct connection between the evolution of slavery and the current situation by making literature the arena of a war over American memory, where the processes of the trauma materialization, dissemination, and recovery could be traced (Vincelj, 2018). The activities and patterns of slavery are brought to light through the works of literary criticism that relies greatly on memory studies, supported by archival researches, social history, trauma studies, and cultural studies, as the basis on which the U.S. and its identity are founded. Slavery was one of the most brutal, murderous, and oppressive institutions of the history of the USA and the profound cultural imagination of African-American life. The slavery tries to excuse itself by its open rejection of equality and by total and utter negligence of the psychological needs, continued trauma, and extreme suffering of the person; the individual slave was inhumanely denied all rights possible and was systematically humiliated to the rank of a cheap labor source, an inanimate object or working animal, deprived of any identity and humanity in a society that treated them as dispensable labor. (Hartman, 2022) Between the years 1562 and 1807, the transatlantic slave trade had held about fifteen million Africans captives. More than five million people were killed during the journey and one million met the same fate in the initial two decades of slave trade. There were also three million casualties in American colonies and were either murdered intentionally or died of labor in the mines or on the farms. The mental impact was simply devastating on the survivors. They also lost their identity and that ontological basis required to earn dignity, identity and sanity. It pushed them to fantasy and insanity. (Janoff-Bulman & Berger, 2021) conceptualization of the story. The narration takes place in the post-civil war America where Sethe, a woman, is the protagonist whose traumatic life defines her identity and relationships. In the analysis of the novel, the issue of the haunting memories of slavery that are not only confined to Sethe but also to those who are near her depict the widely spread nature of the issue of such trauma. The given approach shows that the scope of psychological aftereffects should be explored to understand the scope of struggles the characters are facing, as well as the slavery legacy that haunts them. Exploring these themes, the article highlights the radical influences of the past on the identity of self-perception and relationships, which is an excellent critique of the enduring consequences of slavery (Amina and Yasmine, 2024).

### **Literature Review**

The critical research has performed a careful and detailed study of the unremitting trauma that has accrued due to slavery and its misleadingly devastating psychological impacts on both the individual as well as the

community over generations. One of the main points of this vast research is related to the manner in which the seminal work *Beloved* by Toni Morrison addresses these sophisticated issues directly and how it does it so profoundly. The complex physical and mental effects of slavery on the African Americans have been explored with the prism of its strongly persistent characters and the current motifs that permeate the story. Other academic experts have highlighted such key points as the power of education in the development of the individual and collective, the significance of maintaining memory, both personal and community, and the innovative novelistic methods of historical inquiry that Morrison uses throughout the celebrated *Beloved*; and many works are found on the complexity of the language of trauma which permeates the text and its implications at large (Amina & Yasmine, 2024). Although these contributions to the discourse are highly valuable, a significant and alarming gap in the academic literature also remains in the literature about the overall picture of these interrelated issues and what they imply to comprehend the legacies of slavery. In order to fill this gap, the following research approach summarizes a specific literary and psychological study with the specific intention to unravel the insidious treatment of the remnants of slavery by Morrison, especially in the perception of her seminal novel. Published twenty-eight years after the American Civil War was finished, *Beloved* is the heartbreaking and touching story of Sethe, a former slave, which is made to face the haunting spirit of her dead daughter, *Beloved*. The great work by Morrison, whose remarkable feature is the complex and multi-layered arrangement of the plot, explores deeply the long-term psychological effects of slavery, not only on the person who experienced the horrors of slavery directly, but also on his or her heirs, which is the intergenerational consequences of traumas. The story itself is deeply based on the horrific historical example of Margaret Garner, a runaway slave who in the desperate and rebellious act took the life of her own child in an attempt to flee the blaring terrors of being recaptured as a slave. Critical Analysis of the Trauma of Slavery and Its Long-term Impact The history of slavery, and its long-term and widespread implications, has been taken as the focal point of the intensive research discourse where the exploration is highly important. The kind of resistance that occurred during the slavery era was creative and effective in a number of ways both physically and symbolically. The defiant resistance by some of the slaves to obey the language of their master completely by creating a separate version of the African-American dialect and others to create other forms of world processes that were manifested in the spiritually deep-seated Black spirituals. The specter of abolition as it loomed on the horizon created the specter of fears and ambivalence that were deeply ingrained in the slaves, which was clearly reflected in the accident narratives which portrayed the experiences, traumas and dreams that they had lived through. Life and work of the legendary Frederick Douglass is heart-rendingly typified by such themes as the fundamental role of education, the role of memory in shaping the identity, and the roots of the African-American literary genre (Vincelj, 2018). This association of America and the rest of the Atlantic world had significant weight and substance not only in the context of its bloody historical effects but even more in regards to the revolutionary and transformative thoughts that had been circulating among the members of the transatlantic world during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The sudden flavor of freedom that came with the plantations ruled by the New World dynamics was a psychic shock that is too great and echoes in the modern discourse and culture. Especially important in the narrative by Morrison is how she takes her time to focus on how people caught in the middle of a historic disaster cope with their terrible experiences as well as the recollections that do not fade away of that disaster in the traumatic aftermath of slavery, and the connection between memory, trauma and self in the traumatic aftermath of slavery is explored in such a way that is both intricate and complex. Morrison, in this exploration also encourages the readers to share and even contemplate the far-reaching psychological effects that such root historical legacies imprint on individuals and the psyche of a community as a whole, requiring that they reckon with the past in empathy. (DiPace, 1994)

### **Methodology**

The article discusses the psychological impact of slavery and how much it has been harmful to the psychological terrain of a slave by exploring *Beloved* by Toni Morrison (Vincelj, 2018). It starts with the brief background of the novel, which identifies the historical and literary context of the novel, the importance of the psychological trauma caused by slavery and locates the study through its scope and purpose which informs the choice of the literature to be reviewed. Afterwards the psychoanalytical approach and the methods of analysis utilized in the research are presented, and the findings about the characterization, narrative techniques, and symbolism that disclose the traces and to whatever degree the trauma experienced by the slavery experience are revealed are introduced. The article contributes to the field by talking about how the characters redefine themselves and

rewrite their histories during the process of survival, healing, recovery, and rebirth, therefore, it is possible to explain why the remembrance and reappropriation by the characters are critical to self-definition and survival. This section explains the sources of data, analysis method, and theoretical frameworks that were used in the study. The main analytical framework is the psychoanalytical criticism, supplemented with the knowledge of the trauma and memory studies, discourse analysis, affect theory, and research about postmemorial slavery. The analysis is based on two main sources of data the primary literary text and the contextual materials stemming out of the sociohistorical background, including historical sources and the current critical interpretations. Effective use of these sources helps interpret the current impact of slavery as a haunting experience of trauma that haunts the victim and requires dealing with and acceptance to survive the generations and to prevent continuation (Bassi, 2014).

### **Results**

The critical study of this great novel *Beloved* by Toni Morrison shows that a number of characters portrays many aspects of the haunting psychic effect of the slavery that were still in the minds of former slaves even years after being physically free. The identified methods of analysis include literary analysis, which has been strategically adapted using two different psychological approaches to assess the responsiveness of the characters to their past traumas and different coping strategies that they rely on. The information that will be used in this research involves primary textual data that has been obtained with care of the novel itself and is synthesized with secondary data that will offer critical interpretation and in-depth analysis of the themes and character dynamics in the text. With its all-encompassing examination we can understand more about the residual impact of slavery on individual psyches (Cross Jr, 2024). The memories of the victims do not only control their present but future development. In the event of the repression of these, rendering the past invisible, the present is overloaded. Individuals fail to make use of the chance to experience the present (Vincelj, 2018). They therefore harbor negative feelings of fear and guilt as manifested by the literary techniques used. The characters cannot convey their condition in this condition. When the character development is analyzed, it is possible to see that the traumatic past is limitless. Although it might be many decades later, there are psychological effects that the former slaves have to live with. The division of the society into two subgroups makes it possible to explore the tension and integration process. The distorted reaction to trauma creates opposite personality traits that are coped with the help of different strategies (Bassi, 2014). The figurative appearance of the ghost can therefore be seen in a better place as a necessary storytelling tool to the description of the psychological effects of slavery.

### **Discussion**

*Beloved* gives a life to the rich and deep psychological effect of slavery which is heavily felt by the character of Sethe who is especially sensitive to the lost identities which are tragically caused by the traumatic memories vividly portrayed in the building up of the story. These are strong narrative memories that can be largely attributed to her torturous experiences as a slave at Sweet Home, which hold a towering presence in her history and haunt her in the present in disturbing and terrifying developments. The ghost as a symbolical figure is not only a way to collect the buried but also to incarnate the highly repressed memories in which the terrible and horrific history of Louisianan slavery is imprinted, and it is possible to see the great burden of the collective trauma that Sethe is so tragically incapable of dispelling or completely getting rid of. The memories of Sweet Home, then, are written in the very process of slavery itself and they haunt the story through the ghostly figure of the ghost, which serves as continual reminder of a past full of pain and painfulness. In most cases, the location of the traumatic memory is placed within the boundaries of the home, with the family, society or even the larger diaspora, that is outside the physical location of the slave plantation itself. Nevertheless, the haunting memories of slavery at Sweet Home are still too suppressed and not even visible at a glance, whereas the memory about the Sweet Home slave-owners can be still recovered not so easily, but it is much more visible to the characters as well as to the readers. The explicit references to the infamous Ku Klux Klan, contrasted by the explicit lack of the concrete and flesh descriptions of the Sweet Home slave-owners, imply quite eloquently that it is the slave-owners who are the solitary, mysterious, and suspended in their significance, which seems to be a rather creepy and chilling effect (FAULKNER and HOMES2022). The narrative displacement which takes place in the text is, therefore, a mournful version of silencing, in which the discourse selectively refuses to mention any important moments of slavery, all but those which can be covered by the repetition of a fantasy about a romantic relationship between slaves and their masters, which in turn blurs the painful realities further. Two of the set of suspended promises also enter into the overall story after the heart-wrenching and devastating death of *Beloved*, and they just fit along with the emotional topography of the characters. These heart-rending scenes are forever

pouted in the novel, like the mystery of Sweet Home itself. They might quite possibly remain unresolved for the predictable duration, having an indefinite and irreversible dark shadow on the lives of the characters who remain forever involved in this tragic history. (Apio, 2023)

### **Conclusion**

This paper has demonstrated that slavery disintegrates identity and corrodes the coherent sense of self of the enslaved that leaves haunting traces of survivors and their offspring and distorts group relations so as to postpone the reconstitution of the self. It has also shown that psychological reality of oppression could be effectively reclaimed in fiction through a combination of a suitable realistic approach to character and incident with a somewhat oblique narrative approach, and has shown that such a recovery could then alternatively elicit a new vision of the long-lasting effects of a historical experience of which one can often forecast the magnitude but rarely fully realize the magnitude. It is obvious that the potential to recover the repressed heritage in other forms, in other points of view, and with other ends still clearly exists; but the necessity of ensuring that one keeps doing so, that people should not ignore the fact of past trauma, or that they need to complicate this question further by raising the question of how and why the forces and practices of past trauma are going to keep reproducing themselves, is evident, and it may be that the primary service of markers like *Beloved* will be in ensuring that they avoid asking whether it is feasible or not. The insightful individual who decides to go down the avenue of art and narrative can be fruitfully directed by the initial analysis (Bassi, 2014) though the problem is indubitably wider and the original insight may be instructive in any multitude of situations. The past is never dead.

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