

75. Reconstruction of black identity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

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Abstract

This paper explores Morrison's post-emancipation perspectives regarding the Black people's movement and explores their identity deconstruction and reconstruction based on the reclamation of their authority and ownership to form their black identity in *Beloved*. Considering how these people were physically and emotionally exploited, Morrison sees the fundamental solution of black liberation through the recovery and reclamation of authentic blackness. To examine the relations between the black and white people in *Beloved*, this paper refers to the works of Homi Bhabha and Frantz Fanon to merge hybridity, mimicry, and ambivalence concepts. Considering Fanon's black problem in *the facts of blackness* and Bhabha's *hybridity and resistance theories*, this paper traces Morrison's *Beloved* and debates how and where she locates the liberated black identity. Reconfiguring the experiences of a black slave woman who murders her baby, the author unfolds how black people attain liberty and self-authority at the center of an oppressive system. Eventually, Morrison concludes that the black identity is constructed on the socio-political ground where cultures are hybrid, and these black people are recreated as resistant individuals.

Keywords: Black identity, identity reconstruction, black skin, self-authority, black ownership

Toni Morrison'ın *Sevgili*'sinde siyah kimliđin yeniden inřası

Öz

Bu makale, Morrison'ın Siyah halkın hareketine iliřkin özgürleřme sonrası perspektiflerini arařtırıyor ve *Beloved*'da siyah kimliklerini oluřturmak için yetkilerini ve sahipliklerini yeniden kazanmalarına dayalı olarak kimliklerinin yapıřökümünü ve yeniden inřasını arařtırıyor. Bu insanların fiziksel ve duygusal olarak nasıl sömürüldüklerini göz önünde bulunduran Morrison, siyahların kurtuluřunun temel çözümünü siyahlıđın geri kazanılması ve ıslahı yoluyla görüyor. *Beloved*'daki siyah ve beyaz insanlar arasındaki iliřkileri incelemek için bu makale, Homi Bhabha ve Frantz Fanon'un melezlik, taklit ve müphemlik kavramlarını birleřtirme alıřmalarına atıfta bulunmaktadır. Fanon'un siyah sorununu siyahlık gerçekleri ve Bhabha'nın melezlik ve direniř teorileri göz önünde bulundurarak, bu makale Morrison'ın *Sevgilisinin* izini sürmekte ve özgürleřmiř siyah kimliđi nasıl ve nerede konumlandırđını tartıřmaktadır. Bebeđini öldüren siyahi bir köle kadının deneyimlerini yeniden şekillendiren yazar, siyahların baskıcı bir sistemin merkezinde özgürlük ve öz-otoriteye nasıl kavuřtuđunu gözler önüne seriyor. Sonunda Morrison, siyah kimliđin kültürlerin melez olduđu sosyo-politik zemin üzerine inřa edildiđi ve bu siyah insanların direnli bireyler olarak yeniden yaratıldıđı sonucuna varıyor.

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Anahtar kelimeler: Siyah kimlik, kimliğin yeniden yapılandırılması, siyah ten, öz otorite, siyah mülkiyet

Introduction

Toni Morrison, who was born in 1931, in Ohio, USA, was famous for her writing about black people's lives and experiences. She wrote many successful novels, however, her novel, *Beloved*, is the best which won a prize in 1988. Morrison has covered many aspects of African American people's lives such as slavery, injustice, maternity, and cultural identity. The main subject of her novel, *Beloved*, is focused on slavery and its influence on its characters' psyches, and Morrison has dedicated her book to over sixty million Africans and their ancestors who lost their lives because of the transatlantic slave trade during the years.

This paper traces the reconstruction of the black identity which Toni Morrison tries to display in *Beloved*, and the author attempts to manifest the formation of black identity and ownership that finally results in their liberation. This paper analyses African American identity formation and hybridity after emancipation, arguing how the female protagonist, who did not have the support of her community because of the severe white colonialism definitions on them, could revise her painful memories to deconstruct and reconstruct her identity and self, claimed her self-authority to get fit in the American society by being black. To analyze the complexity of relations between the whites and blacks in *Beloved*, this paper refers to *Frantz Fanon's* and *Homi Bhabha's* theories which merge and combine *hybridity*, *mimicry*, and *ambivalence* concepts. Through these theoretical frames, how Toni Morrison liberated black identity and the reconstruction of their black identity will be considered.

Theoretical perspectives in Tony Morrison's *Beloved*

According to Frantz Fanon (1952), the identity of black people was not a self-created one, but it was imposed and defined by the white dominant society in which they lived, mainly based on their skin color. The black people's skin color defined their cultural identity and this statement is the key concept of Fanon's *Facts of Blackness*. He states "in the white man's world, the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. The consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness" (Fanon, 1952, p. 110). He searches for the blacks' self-consciousness in the post-colonial world, and in his opinion, the black problem is the Black community's experience of inferiority created by the white society. White people define the individual's cultural identity based on his/her skin color; therefore, it is not related to how much you are culturally affected by your education, friends, or families, but the skin color makes the white society judge you. Here, Fanon figures out the main feature of the black problem solely as the color of their skin and makes up his mind "since the others hesitated to recognize me, there remained only one solution to make myself known" (Fanon, 1952, p. 115). The dominant western society defined the blacks' customs, habits, and traditions as brutal and barbaric; the whites considered themselves as superior humans and justified their colonial labels and slavery on the black people, and forced them to assimilate the white society's habits and customs. In the process of exploring self-consciousness, Fanon sees that black individuals are stuck between the two worlds. Firstly, the world that belongs to their ontology; their ancestors' heritage, traditions, and customs that were almost removed and rejected by the white dominant society because they were in contradiction with the civilization standards defined by them; and secondly, the world which belongs to the white society and does not consider them as human beings.

Fanon was caught between the two worlds; the white world rejects him because of his black skin, and his forefathers' world without it he cannot self-identify. As these two worlds cannot integrate, he fully faces the black problem. He attempts to prove the equality of the blacks with the whites; however, he feels unable and states that “there will always be a world, a white world between you and us” (Fanon, 1952, p.122). Eventually, he finds a new approach to Negritude to fit himself into society and the world. He believes that “I am wholly what I am... without a Negro past, without a Negro future, it is impossible for me to live my Negrohood. Not yet white, no longer wholly black...” (Fanon, 1952, p. 135). According to the fundamental features of his Negritude approach, he emphasizes the recovery of Africans in their resistance, self-determination, self-respect, and self-reliance; in other words, he rediscovers a new self for the black individuals to liberate themselves from the white domination and enslavement by reclaiming their heritage, history, and culture to find the rightful spot in the world.

Based on Fanon's ideology, the novel, *Beloved*, which is the life story of a former black slave woman who does not have the chance, permission, or right to speak about the reasons for her infanticide, will be analyzed in detail. Bouson (2000) argues that in *Beloved*, the author is determined to give the chance to a black slave female to retell his white master's story by taking back her authority and power to demonstrate black people's lives in the USA. Since none of the black slaves could write or speak about their history, Morrison attempted to configure and reveal the truth of the interior lives of these black people.

Sethe, a black slave mother murders her baby to free her from the torture she may face in the white dominant society in the future. She claims her self-authority by which the author places the black identity on the socio-political ground in which cultures are hybrid and powers are negotiated and those black people are reproduced as resistant individuals. As Morrison considers *Beloved* a socio-political struggle in African American literary history, she is willing to use her novel as a tool to change and interrupt the hegemonic knowledge system of society (Kim, 2010). Through the black literary traditions, the author is seeking blackness. Some other explorers such as Furman (1996) consider Morrison's work as an instrument for conveying cultural concepts or a representative of the folks. Kim (2010) argues that *Beloved* displays how the black vision changes in the white western cultural hegemony. Accordingly, this paper investigates how Toni Morrison reveals the protagonist's resistance and agency to claim her black power in American history, and how she becomes powerful with her blackness and her past to claim her black identity.

Grewal (2000) considers *Beloved* a reply to the significance of cultural critiques, redefinition, and reclamation. Durrant (2012) defines the novel as a struggle between cruel past experiences and the hope for a free future. Morrison's *Beloved* focuses on the characters who negate themselves and seek their blackness, and her main concern is to reconfigure the black identity built by the white discourse. The author's reconfiguration toward the black identity is a moving entity that takes various formats in historical or socio-political circumstances. Additionally, she disassembles the binary system of black and white or defined and definer to illuminate the agency of African minorities in the US and their resistance in the heart of the oppressive atmosphere. For instance, Morrison's protagonist, Sethe, who has been known as a desperate black slave woman, can be presented as a symbol of resistance; a resistant individual who acted against her white master's demands and claimed the ownership of her baby. In this way, Morrison describes her character as a subversive element who hybridizes the colonial discourse to emphasize the black people's agency in the white American system. Eventually, Morrison's *Beloved* is where blackness sits in the socio-political space in which cultures are hybridized and the individuals are reshaped as resistant and subversive elements in that system (Kim, 2010).

Sethe, who infanticides her baby daughter, refuses her master's story of this incident, and retells it from a black slave mother's definition, by claiming the chance of speaking. In this way, Morrison examines the ideological forces which come up with the reasons for the tragedy. The author analyzes the slavery history in the US and considers the black community and its people because the western system identified them as primitive, wild, or animals to legitimize their desires. Whenever those black people behaved as the white masters' definitions of wildness and animality, their main intentions got disconnected and entered the space of hybridity in Bhabha's representations. The protagonist of Morrison's *Beloved*, Sethe, changes the dominant rules of society; intentionally or unintentionally, she challenges the system of slavery and eventually maintains her self-authority. Sethe's mother-in-law threw away her infants after giving birth to them through the white men's rapes, or Sethe murders her baby daughter to prevent the danger of being captured by the Schoolteacher. These black women are called savage and brutal by the whites based on the definitions of the western dominant discourse; however, Morrison lets the readers listen to their voices of self-authority, resistance, and power against their white masters' demands for being sexual objects or breeders. These women challenged the slavery system by claiming ownership of their children, although they might have been known as animals or brutal blacks who lack human characteristics. At the same time, they interrupted the economic system of slavery since they were supposed to serve their white masters as sexual objects and give birth to as many black children as possible for their future workforces. Therefore, for Morrison, being violent is a strategy for reclaiming their ethnic black identity and heritage, and the violent gestures of these black slaves are the symbols of their self-authority and resistance.

Reconstruction of black identity by reacting against the white masters' definitions

Pereira (1997) believes that Morrison's *Beloved*, unlike her other fictions, concentrates on the primary philosophical concepts of memory, time, love, and identity which are not restricted by any dominant cultural frameworks. Duval (2000) states that *Beloved* is a postmodern novel concentrated on the formation of identity in a multiple and flowing process. Elliott (2000) believes that in *Beloved*, the author's focus is more on the characters' black ownership and self-liberation within the western slavery system.

The novel's female protagonist, Sethe, figures out that getting rid of slavery oppression and the formation of a new identity and self is not necessarily equal to gaining physical liberation: "freeing yourself was one thing, claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (Morrison, 2007, p. 95). Thus, Morrison reveals that black identity reconstruction is not only liberating yourself but also claiming the ownership of that liberated self that demands resistance and agency of that black individual (Kim, 2010). In the process of the black identity formation, Morrison considers the matter of self-ownership which happens through the character's resistance and agency. She displays how the black slaves resisted, reacted against their masters, claimed their authority, and demanded their agency in the center of an oppressive history. The author let her characters' voices, which belonged to the black subaltern community, be heard outside of their white masters' definitions. Through the story of a black mother slave who decided to murder her baby daughter to refuse her master's unilateral definition of her, Morrison explored the strains which led to the tragedy. More significantly, the author concentrated on the blackness to state that her protagonist is not being assimilated and is reclaiming her heritage. The racial discourse which she attempted to display includes the violence, wildness, or animality, the projected labels on the black community by the dominant western society. The author emphasizes that the black identity's resistance occurs exactly where the western colonial violence happens. Thus, *Beloved* novel represents the white dominant society as the center of oppression and resistance. The author

displays that, in this condition, the blacks have not always been miserable victims in an oppressive era, but they were politically resistant elements who claimed their self-ownership. It is a kind of space they create for themselves to prove that they are more than what the whites think of them. Therefore, when Morrison rewrites the black subalterns' voices to be heard by the readers, she emphasizes the reconfiguration of the black identity, not only in a certain geographical location but also based on the political perspectives of the black communities', so-called, animality, wildness, and violence.

Reinterpretation of traumatic memories

Beloved is an amalgamation of imagination, mind, memory, the white masters' behavior, and the significance of the racial ideology in this regard. Morrison's main purpose of this narration is a re-examination of traumatic black slaves' memories and their white masters' behavior to reinterpret the slavery colonial space.

Mc Dowell (1989) believes that Morrison challenges the ethical judgment of the tragedy and retells the story of a black slave mother to put the authority into Sethe's hands because she wants to give her voice the chance to be heard by the readers. Therefore, *Beloved* represents the subaltern black people's enslavement who were silenced by the white definers. Morrison's description of Sixo, one of the male black slaves, severely beaten by his white master for using his logic and language, is a reminder of the point that "the definition only belonged to the definer, not that defined" (Morrison, 2007, p.191). The author indicates the fact that slavery simultaneously imposed physical exploitation on black people and took them deep into the lowest status of society where they were not able to speak or present themselves in that condition. *Beloved's* protagonist, and her murdered daughter, do not only represent the painful history of the black community and their physical violence but also their inability toward the recording their history. Since Sethe lacks the language, which is the tool for her representation, she suffers the psychological pain which comes from her terrible memories. Grewal (2000) states that this inability in speaking and expressing self has kept the black people colonized even after emancipation, and it has remained a trauma among them. This trauma had become a part of their identity, and that is why the protagonist of the novel looked for her black identity to get liberated from the defined identity on her by the white dominant society.

Regarding the reinterpretation of Sethe's horrible memories, there are various opinions on *Beloved's* identity after more than three decades of its narration, although it was admitted that she was a return of that murdered baby girl. For instance, Edwards defines *Beloved's* character as "unquestionably the dead daughter's spirit in human form" (Edwards, 1987, p. 19), while Clemons calls her "a ghost from that slave ships of Sethe's ancestry" (Clemons, 1987, p. 76). Despite various interpretations of *Beloved's* character, it is widely accepted that she returns in the form of a repressed story to stimulate her mother, Sethe, to talk about the unspeakable reasons for her baby's infanticide (Kim, 2010). Elliott (2000) states that *Beloved* haunted house 124 to force Sethe to confront her fears. There are two assumptions regarding *Beloved* character and the relationship she made with her mother; firstly, it is assumed that *Beloved* is a supernatural being who came from Sethe's subconscious to stimulate her to recall the past, or in other words, to punish her because of her act. Secondly, she returns to remind Sethe of her infanticide, a tragic and painful memory to recall and confront her fears.

On the other hand, Sethe feels guilty about her action in the past and miserably prays for her murdered child to return so she can clarify her reasons. Accordingly, Kim (2010) argues that *Beloved* is Sethe's conscience that constantly blames her. As Sethe is not capable of speaking and expressing herself about

the causes of infanticide, or she cannot blame the slavery system as the main reason for the infanticide, the ghostly character of *Beloved* appears in her life. Thus, Sethe's experience of infanticide was unspeakable, not just a painful experience to remember. McBride (1997) states that Sethe's infanticide could not be analyzed in the logic of her white master.

Regarding the physical and psychological violence of the white colonial history on the black people, Toni Morrison has revealed some episodes stating the dominant culture enforced on the black community; for instance, fastening the iron bit on Paul D's mouth, or when Sixo was severely beaten by her white master because of taking the position of a definer instead of defined. Additionally, Sethe's infanticide story and her conflicts with the painful memories of her past were all because of the destructive power of a white master's language on them as a definer. Therefore, Sethe's main struggles in life are not only because of her action toward her baby daughter but because of her inability to express her feeling of love toward her. As she could not have the right and ability to express herself, her action was recorded as an indicator of the blacks' wildness and animality. Additionally, her action was directly interpreted as the loss of property in her white master's opinion, and he was only distressed about losing a black slave as his property. This white master, who is not even an abusive one, belongs to a white western system; thus, he interprets Sethe's act within the colonial discourse that believes in the black people's primitivism, defining black slaves as animals, sub-humans, or even non-humans. Hence, in *Orientalism*, Said (1979) believes that various forces in this socio-political construction have brought these black people into western learning and slavery.

Restricted in this discourse, Sethe is unable to express the way she loved her daughter. She is unable of speaking outside the whites' definition recording her decision as immorality and racial decay. Thus, another significant issue, as Fanon (1952) believed, is that the whites define the blacks' memories and moral standards. The white western dominance of their moral standards is too severe that even Paul D's reaction towards Sethe's tragedy is based on colonial definitions. He follows their master's logic by accusing Sethe of being wild and brutal: "There could have been a way, some other way. You got two feet not four..." (Morrison, 2007, p. 166). Sethe is also under the impact of her white master's definitions. Her memory has lost the main intention of loving her baby under the pressure of such a life condition; therefore, she blames herself for her action in the past. As she states, she attempts to "keep the past at bay" (Morrison, 2007, p. 42), because she is barely capable to recall the main reason for her act of love toward her daughter. In Sethe's opinion, memory is helpless in representing a hegemonic culture, that is why she tries to *re-memory* to speak about the original story of her act outside the master's narratives and restrictions. Bouson (2000) argues that *re-memory*, or the reconfiguration of a memory, which is related to Sethe's uncontrolled recalling and relieving of past terrible experiences, becomes a tactic of decolonizing her painful memories defined by a white master. It gives her the chance of moving outside the colonial discourse, instead of recalling the story from the memory which is based on her white master's discourse, and it gives her a sense of loving her baby in the given social and historical context of slavery. Getting back to *Beloved's* character, she is a tension between Sethe's memories and her wish to *re-memory* her painful past. *Beloved* should be taken out of Sethe's memories and be taken into her re-memories. In other words, *Beloved* is exactly Sethe's self and her guilty feelings of infanticide. That is why in some sections of the novel, *Beloved's* and Sethe's identities merge. Morrison tried to reveal to the readers as Sethe feels more relieved by moving her memories toward her re-memories, *Beloved* is closer to being repelled. In other words, *Beloved* is only expelled by decolonizing Sethe's memories (the way defined by the colonial discourse), to her re-memories (the social and historical contexts which surround Sethe). However, her painful memories are not just limited to her murdered child; a part of her horrible past is the grief of being rejected and ignored by the black community.

Why their community cut off their support for Sethe and her family members can be interpreted in various ways. One of the reasons is that they thought Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, had overstepped the community rules and had offended them by excess. Another interpretation is that black people believe that Baby Suggs and her family did not suffer as much as they did in slavery; thus, because of the lack of a mutual history among them, mutual trust became difficult to achieve (Kim, 2010). The black people's negligence and lack of support for Sethe's family reveal the fact that the black community of that era did not have a homogeneous identity and ethnicity that could share similar oppressions or demands for social justice. Morrison has tried to display to the readers that the other black people were also involved in the tragedy; they were all complicit with the Schoolteacher and his nephews in Sethe's infanticide. In this way, Morrison has manifested Sethe's infanticide as a story of a community that suffered the lack of mutual trust, not as a story of a primitive black slave. Sethe was completely sane at the time of murdering her daughter and made a logical decision to do the act; so, she blames the slavery system as the main reason for her murder and later tries to clarify to Beloved what it was really like living in enslavement. She explains to her that her decision of killing her baby daughter was the most sensible decision against the system in which the black slaves were the whites' property, workforce, or sexual entities. Sethe's explanation clarifies the fact that the story of a black slave mother who infanticides her baby through desperation is interpreted as a mother who attempts to preserve her baby from the horrible experiences she has already lived through, and in this way, she reclaims her taken black power and ethnicity.

The fact of Sethe's ethical decision of protecting her daughter makes the readers reconsider Bhabha's statement: "the very historical basis of our ethical judgment" (Bhabha, 2012, p. 11). Sethe could be relieved of her past guilty memories and free herself from Beloved's grasp by revising her painful past in the historical discourse of slavery. When she reconfigures her painful past as how she loved her baby daughter, Beloved immediately disappears. When Sethe confronts a similar situation at the end, she mistakenly thinks that Mr. Bodwin is the Schoolteacher who has come to take Denver; So, she suddenly gets back to the time of her infanticide; however, this time she makes a different decision, and she assaults Mr. Bodwin to protect her daughter. She acts differently this time, she makes her best decision to protect her daughter, Denver. She made the most sensible ethical decision under the oppression of slavery eighteen years ago, and now as a free black individual who has the legal right to protect her family, she attacks a white man to express her love for her daughter, Denver. This event shows how Sethe has become powerful with her blackness and her past.

Duth & Balakrishnan (2017) state that Morrison's narrative style in *Beloved* takes the advantage of both realism and magic to challenge the authoritative colonist behavior and, therefore, can be alleged as a significant tactic to display the post-colonial experience of African American former slaves in the US. Additionally, it gives an alternative perspective to the readers to reconsider the dominant western definitions as the main causes of the unspoken and silenced voices of slaves' generations of African people in the US. Beloved abandons Sethe's home and family when Sethe confronted her painful past and was freed into her present life. Sethe attempts to define a new historical context in which her unspeakable personal memories were transferred into the history of a black community, and she eventually released herself from Beloved as Rushidy calls her "the incarnated memory of her guilts" (Rushidy, 1992, p. 578). Beloved's character represented Sethe's past that rejected her as a human being, colonized her memory, and interrupted her present life.

Resistance, the blacks' tactic for reacting against the whites' domination

Bamberger (2020) explores the protagonists' agency and resistance and believes that the author sees the painful memory of the black slaves back into the slavery historical discourse. The black identity resisted severely against an oppressive reality and retained a self-authority in the heart of an oppressive site. The author investigated the presence of the blacks who interrupted white colonizers' discourse by performing violent or savage gestures against their masters to take control of their self-authority against their emotional and physical tortures. Morrison discovers the shortage of African Americans' identity and voice and inserts the black people's self-authority into the slavery system of that era. Morrison's self-authority of African Americans comes into existence when she explores the slaves' silence and oppression, and she interprets the slaves' acts and gestures as their political reactions toward the white colonial discourse. The *Beloved* novel reveals to the readers the fact that western society used its representational power to keep a hegemony over the black slaves, and instead, they disabled this power by using ethical terms in various subversive ways (Kim, 2010). Sethe's usage of *safety* or *love* as the main reason for her infanticide disagrees and interrupts the original meaning of the whites' ethical standards. Therefore, this situation transforms Sethe's position to an active agent who violates the standards of white society. Additionally, Morrison questions the rightfulness of the colonial discourse and its political impacts on the racial discourses which the colonizers have constructed to validate their control over the blacks. Because white masters recorded blackness with those racial discourses of sub-humanity, animality, or wildness to explain the system of slavery. In other words, blackness and its labeled wildness are socially constructed terms, defined by the white colonizers as an indicator of non-humanization and black skin had become an ideological symbol of inferior individuals with corrupted morals.

Jweid (2021) explores Morrison's narration, agreeing with Fanon's opinion of *the fact of blackness*, and mentions that skin color was a significant matter in public idea; thus, the black community was excluded of its dignity and was taken to the deepest subaltern status that impacted its people's identity before the mid-twentieth century. However, Morrison believes in the presence of whiteness, and its animality titles on the blacks as the modes of the black people's agency and resistance in the center of colonialism, and her belief is also aligned with *the theory of Hybridity and Resistance* by Homi Bhabha.

Bhabha (2012) argues that there is *a hybrid space* in the colonial site while two different contrary powers are included, so it does not solely contain a hegemony. In *Beloved*, these opposing powers are displayed as the white masters' definitions and the black slaves' resistance. As he states, the colonized slaves' wild and savage performance, based on the white masters' inscriptions on them, gets into *a hybrid space* in which colonialism, defined by those masters, becomes neither the one nor the other, but it enters a hybrid space. He invalidates a one-sided power in colonialism because the colonized slaves' performance can transform the dominant conditions into interventional grounds. Therefore, Bhabha's *theory of Hybridity and Resistance* states that resistance exists inside the colonial borders, and they appear as a result of the performing discourses, inscribed by the colonizers in the center of the colonial space.

In analyzing the novel, *Beloved*, Allen (2021) believes that Morrison's narrative style moves from isolation to liberator solidarity, representing African traditions and cultures. In his opinion, *Beloved* offers a hybridized approach to theological meaning. The author interprets a horrible time in the past to overcome the feeling of guilt and a pleasant future. Whenever slaves perform against the colonial standards, known as primitive and wild, the colonial site of slavery becomes a hybrid space in which the black individuals claim their ethnic identity and disobey the defined slavery rules. The *Beloved's* protagonist's infanticide troubles her own memories and her master's, and this reality has been revealed

as a hybrid space by the author. Morrison attempted to analyze Sethe's infanticide not as a violent gesture that was defined by her white master, but this time, as a resistant manner that changed the hegemonic discourse. In this way, Morrison manifested Sethe's infanticide as a strategic tactic by which the black slave mothers interrupted the oppressive social system and claimed their self-authority and ownership. This fact can also be applied to Sethe's mother who used to throw away the babies born out of the white masters' rapes. The *Beloved* book implies that their infanticide acted as revenge toward their masters by which they claimed their self-authority in a colonial site where their black identities were invalidated. Significantly, the black slaves' violent gestures might have been interpreted as an indicator of their African primitivism which fulfilled the desires of the white civilization; however, it became the author's symbol of self-authority or black ownership.

Sethe's infanticide is, however, different from those women who threw away their babies born out of the white masters' rapes and intended to take revenge on them. Her act is interpreted as a resistance to the colonial site of slavery. She interrupted the slavery system in which producing black people was considered the whites' property, thus, she demanded the possession of her baby daughter whom she did not want to relive such a terrible slavery experience. Wike (2017) explores motherhood in *Beloved* and Sethe's traumatic and terrible memories. Her focus is on the institution of American slavery which denied Sethe and her maternal self. She displays how Sethe suffered from racial domination, race, and her skin color which led to her maternal loss. Genovese (2007) also believes that Sethe claimed the ownership of her child to claim her black identity as a mother, not just as a breeder for her white masters. Thus, it is also an indicator of being a resistant figure to claim her black dignity as a mother in a way that she is, not as a breeder in a colonial system.

Henderson (1991) admires Sethe's character as a revisionist historian and calls her a subversive heroine for achieving her black power to transform her painful past. Grewal also states that "Morrison portrays the mother's deed as a heroic act of resistance" (Grewal, 2000, p. 101). Morrison transformed the hegemonic discourse of the colonialism system where African Americans could act as resistant agents and reclaim their black identities. In other words, this novel is an attempt in romanticising the slave women as heroines who quarreled against the white rules and definitions to claim their black identity via agency and resistance. By reconsidering the slave women's behaviors as resistant agents, the author positions their identity *in-betweenness*; from one side, a morally astray black slave woman, and on the contrary, a mother with a self-authority who claims the ownership of her children. Additionally, when Sethe mistakenly assaults Mr. Bodwin as a white master, she reveals her resistant black identity that quarreled against that system. Eventually, Morrison discovers the formation of black identity exactly in the heart of the socio-political basis of American society. Morrison, precisely, manifested Sethe to clarify the colonial system had oppressed and dehumanized these African Americans; however, it simultaneously transformed them into resistant individuals.

Conclusion

This paper concentrates on the reclamation of black identity and dignity in Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*. The author has revealed that the reconstruction of black identity leads to black liberation. Accordingly, the novel was analyzed through the theories of Fanon and Bhabha to consider hybridity, ambivalence, and mimicry concepts that eventually led to the black individuals who were reproduced as resistant figures in the heart of an oppressive system. Morrison attempts to interrupt the hegemony in white American society. She focuses on the characters who negate themselves and seek their ethnic blackness, and her main concern is to reconfigure the blackness that has been defined by the colonial

discourse. The author gives these black individuals the chance to speak loudly and the ability to express themselves through an oppressive atmosphere that called them wild, primitive, and animal. In this way, Morrison refuses the white master's definition of Sethe's infanticide; instead, she examines the ideological forces that caused the tragedy. Whenever the African slaves behaved according to the white masters' definitions of wildness and animality, the fundamental intentions of their discourse interrupted and entered the space of hybridity in which the female characters, in *Beloved*, claimed their self-authority and ownership, by murdering their children, to release them of the slavery torture, or as revenge toward the white men rape. Additionally, they interrupted the economic system of the dominant society by rejecting their defined positions as breeders or sexual objects. Therefore, the wildness and violent gestures of these black females are symbols of their self-authority and resistance to Morrison; in this way, she liberates the black identity and reclaims her ethnicity in a multicultural context.

The author reveals the fact that getting rid of slavery oppression and reconstructing a black identity is not necessarily equal to gaining physical liberation. Therefore, the post-colonial identity status is freeing yourself, and simultaneously, claiming the authority and ownership of that freed self that demands the resistance and agency of black people.

In Morrison's *Beloved*, the voice was given to the subaltern people to be heard outside the masters' definitions to explore the ideological forces that contributed to the reasons for infanticide. Morrison emphasized that the black identity's resistance occurred exactly where the western colonial violence happened, and in this condition, the black slaves were not always the miserable victims, but they acted as resistant political elements who claimed their self-authority and ownership. As a result, in Morrison's rewriting of the subaltern's stories, she reconsiders the black identity not only in a certain geographical location but also based on the political and local perspectives through their projected labels of animality and wildness on them.

Regarding the interpretation of the black slaves' traumatic memories, Morrison gave the authority in her protagonist's hands to challenge the ethical judgment because these subaltern people not only suffered the physical and emotional tortures of the white society but also they were unable to express themselves or speak about their experience. It caused psychological pain in them as a trauma; this inability of expressing themselves kept them colonized even after emancipation. Sethe's infanticide and her conflict with the traumatic memories are all because of the destructive power of white masters' definitions of them as the definers. Accordingly, her trauma is not just because of her infanticide, but because of her inability to express her feeling toward her; because of this inability, her action is recorded as animality and wildness. Additionally, her gesture is interpreted as interrupting the system's economy and as a loss of property in her white master's opinion.

Another significant issue is that white colonialism defined this community's memories and moral standards. Because of the white's dominance over their morality, the other black people's reaction toward Sethe's infanticide is based on their masters' definitions and they are not able to understand the main reasons for her action. Therefore, Sethe uses the tactic of re-memory to relieve and get rid of her traumatic past defined by white colonialism. *Beloved's* character who is a tension between her memories and her wish to re-memory, makes her confront her traumas and fears and stimulates her to speak and express herself. In other words, *Beloved* is Sethe's self and her guilty feelings of infanticide. Therefore, as Sethe tries to relieve herself by moving her memories toward her re-memories, the *Beloved* role becomes faded until she totally disappears in her present life.

The black community's negligence and withdrawal toward Sethe and her family reveal the fact that their black community did not have a homogeneous ethnicity that could share similar demands for social injustice. Morrison believes that the black community was also involved in infanticide at the time of the event because the black community suffered the lack of mutual trust, not as a story of primitive black slaves; eventually, Sethe's explanation is interpreted as a desperate mother who attempted to preserve her baby daughter from a horrible system that used her as a sexual entity, workforce, or property.

Eventually, Sethe confronts a similar situation, and she mistakenly attacks Mr. Bodwin instead of murdering her daughter, Denver. As a free woman who has the legal right to protect her family, she assaults the white man to express her love for her daughter. When Sethe released herself from Beloved who was a representation of her past that rejected her humanity and interrupted her present life, Beloved abandoned her and her family. This event is an indicator of her power, liberty, and self-authority as a black woman. Therefore, the black identity resisted an oppressive reality and retained self-authority in the heart of a colonial site. They interrupted white colonizers' discourse by performing violent or savage gestures against their masters to take control of their ownership and self-authority against their emotional and physical tortures. In Morrison's opinion, such gestures are their political reactions toward white colonialism. As white western society kept a hegemony over black people with its representational power, they instead disabled this power by using ethical words of safety or love in subversive ways. These terms disagreed and interrupted the original meaning of the white masters' ethical standards. This situation transformed the black individuals' position into active agents who violated the standards of white society.

Morrison, also, put the rightfulness of society's discourse and its political impacts under question. Because she believes that the colonizers constructed such a discourse to validate their control over African Americans. For instance, the black skin color had become an ideological symbol of inferior individuals with corrupted morals and minds which reminds us of Frantz Fanon's *black problem in the facts of blackness*. Accordingly, the black community was deprived of its ethnicity and it was taken to the lowest status which impacted its dignity and identity. However, Morrison believes the animality titles on the blacks as the modes of the black people's agency and resistance in the center of an oppressive site, and it is aligned with the *theory of Hybridity and Resistance* by Bhabha. In *Beloved*, the white masters' definitions from one side and the black slaves' performance from the other side create these two contrary powers in a *hybrid space*. In this way, the author invalidates the possibility of an absolute hegemonic power in a colonial site. Whenever the slaves perform against the colonial standards, known as primitivism and wildness, the colonial site of slavery becomes a hybrid place in which the black individuals claim their black self-authority and ownership, and challenge the defined slavery system on them.

To sum up, Morrison transformed the hegemonic discourse of the colonialism system where African Americans could act as resistant agents and reclaim their blackness and dignity. She tried to romanticize the slave women as heroines who quarreled against the white colonizers to claim their black identity based on agency and resistance.

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