

## SLAVERY AND FREEDOM IN TONI MORRISON PARADISE AND BELOVED: A MARXIST APPROACH

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### Abstract

*The influence of politics and political issues on literature is central to Afro- American novels. Based on materialistic, exploitative and capitalistic purposes, Africans- American were product of slavery. The colonialist proved superior power over the colonized, thereby creating a kind of supremacy, through class stratifications. This paper aimed to reveal slavery and freedom in Toni Morrison's Paradise and Beloved using Marxist approach. This work shall use the Marxist theory to bring out the side effect of slavery to the black man psyche; hence there is urge and the need for freedom. From Marxist perspective there are three issues that indicate slavery in this story: inequality, commoditization and alienation. This paper will therefore, concludes that despite years of slavery and racists the black man's resilience moulds his personality in such a way that he is not broken. The characters in the text develop strong and unique personalities to shield themselves from slavery, and the need for their freedom.*

**Keywords: Slavery, Freedom, Marxist approach**

### Introduction

Digging into the archives, one discovers that the plight of the black American began with the historical origin of the enslavement of Africans, which took place in the 15th century. In 1619, the first blacks arrived in the English colonies, which later formed the United States of America. Twenty Africans were said to have been brought to James town and treated as indentured servants. That is, they were servant who owed a five-to-seven year labour obligation in exchange for food and lodging (Raynolds and Walter 1989).

As slaves who arrived into a new world, they were engaged to work in tobacco plantations. The lives of the blacks in the white plantations were very sympathetic and full of sufferings. Their lives could be distinguished by the oppressive relationship between slaves and masters. The slaves were often punished and subjected to series of whipping, even for the least 'offence' committed. The slaves' family system was under the control of the white masters. No slave married at will or made his own choice or even divorced if he wanted. Slave trade is as terrible as hell, one need to consider the fact that people were packed like "sardines" in the most inhuman condition possible to another man's land against their wishes.

According to Lewis Nkosi (1965), the Negro had never forgotten that he had not come to America like other emigrants who came out of their own free will, looking for fame and fortunes; the Negro was wrenched from his homeland and carried into slavery in the most shameful way possible. The black majority has been discriminated against such areas as housing, education and employment. Lewis Nkosi (1965) asserts that blacks are subjected to various prohibitive laws, the law creates a pent-hatred and frustration among nonwhite and when such hatred and frustration are ventilated, the victims instantly become criminal.

The Whiteman shows no remorse for gratefully taking the black into slavery even the white justified their humiliation and exploitation of the blacks. One of the Renaissances essay it and writer, James Baldwin (1961) says When I was growing up, Negro in this country were taught to be ashamed of Africa. They were taught it bluntly, as I was, for example, by being told that Africa, had never contributed anything to civilization. In 1790, the first census put the population of blacks at 757,000. Not only had the population grown rapidly with an average increase of six percent each year, but the colonies had established a system of slavery such that fewer than ten percent of the nation's blacks were free at the time of revolution. The

Negroes, according to historical facts, were the source of cheap labour and they quickly became the most popular race in America, simply because of the kind of work their masters used them for. By the end of the 17th century, colonial courts established that blacks could be held as slaves for the duration of their lives. Slaves became the preferred source of labour since they were held in perpetuity they had no legal rights and they reproduced their kinds. In the cities of North, during this period, slaves worked at skilled and unskilled jobs, while in the South most of them worked as agriculturists.

According to Marx, the moving force behind human history is its economic systems, for people's life is determined by their economic circumstances. A society, he says, is shaped by its "forces of production," the methods it uses to produce the material elements of life. The economic conditions underlying the society are called material circumstances, and the ideological atmosphere they generate is known as the historical situation. This means that to explain any social or political context, any event or product, it is first necessary to understand the material and historical circumstances in which they occur.

General history of human development in the world is out of slavery phase even though it is different in different place and community. This is in line with Engerman (2003) argues that slavery has taken many different forms; it has been among the most frequent of human institutions, existing in almost all societies in the past and in most parts of the world. Slavery is a system in a society where human or group of human own slaves, whereby the slaves are subjected to a condition of having to work very hard without proper remuneration or appreciation. It could also be refers to a condition in which individuals are owned by others, who control where they live and what they do.

Slavery creates a situation where a mother is separated from her child and brings about devastating consequences for both parties, often mothers do not know themselves to be anything except a mother, so when they are unable to provide material care for their children, or their children are taken away from them, they feel a lot of sense of self. Similarly, when a child is separated from his or her mother, he/she loses the familiar identity associated with mother-child relationships.

Slave master can do anything to the slave because the slave belongs to him and can be sold to another master. Generally, slaves are workers who are under command of the master and asked to do all of the master works. According to Marxist perspective there are four epochs of human development in the world namely: Primitive communism, ancient society, feudal society and capitalist society (Livesey, 2018).

Generally in those epochs, slavery happens in ancient society. Nevertheless, historically slavery can be found in modern era when people have economic income and power. People who have more economic income enslave others who do not have economic income to fulfill their need in daily life. Even though the relationship between those people is worker and work giver but still oppression happens in their relationship. Marxism view the oppression in society based on socioeconomic that make stratification into class in society. This perspective consistently holds by Marxist in viewing social stratification from primitive communism to capitalist society. In capitalist society, according to Marxist, people are divided into "haves" class and "have-nots" class, bourgeois and proletariat. Socio-economic class not only views stratification from economic power but also political power (Tyson, 2006).

Based on the perspective of class stratification on socio-economic in capitalist society, Marxism critics in literature focuses on class stratification and oppression in the societies, Marxism reveals the oppression of the upper class toward the lower class in a capitalist society within the text. According to Marxists, even literature itself is a social institution and has a specific ideological function, based on the background and ideology of the author. Furthermore, Marxist focuses on the oppression of a lower class by an upper class. They examine how people are made into commodities to make money.

In Marxist perspective, what author thought and wrote in his/her work are reflection from objectives in their environment, as Perverse (2014) state that a literary scholar's task consists in discovering the objective reality in a work of literature which provided the material for it and determined its structure. Furthermore, Terry Eagleton as cited in Castle (2007) insists that "The literary text is not the 'expression' of ideology, nor is ideology but the 'expression' of social class," It means that critic reveals the objective of capitalism as a reality that happens in society as economic development and divide people base on economic power.

It is clear that the novel depicted inequality among the characters. This inequality is structure by race that is American and African, even though, Marxism do not divide human based on the race but in this case, the fact that African at that time lacks economic power, this means that African was poor. This economic circumstance, make him work for the farm owners. In this relation, the farm owner is superior to the worker, so the worker becomes the inferior. It can be seen that the position of farm owner, then become slave owner, is structured by having farm as capital rather than slaves. This is in line with Marxist perspective about a fundamental division between two social group; namely one group who have control to food production and other fundamental resources that is needed by the society. Then, the other group is a group who has not owned or controlled the production (Livesey, 2018). Having the resources of production may make inequality in the society so that it appears in superiority versus inferiority.

Enslavement by Garners in this story is suggested by economic motive that will be gotten if the use slaves to do the work in their farm. By using the slaves they can ask them to work without paying attention to the fee because they are slave owners who have right to the slaves. This makes way for surplus in production by employing the slaves they have. This is what Marxist critics say in capitalist society that they tend to accumulate the capital by minimizing the cost production; one of the ways is that low price of worker or labour. In the pre-capitalist society, feudal to capitalist, having slaves is part of minimizing the cost of production. It can be concluded that it is clearly depicted that slavery is caused by economic motive, not racial motive.

Even though, Marxism is appropriate with capitalist economics system but it can be useful there because capitalism and slavery are intimately related as historical phenomenon. We can see this approach clearly in *Beloved* where the characters are divided into the upper class (master) and the lower class (slaves).the upper class are those who enslaves the lower class and these are Mr. and Mrs. Garner, schoolteacher. 'While the lower class are those who become slaves and this are Paul D, Paul A, Sethe, Denver, Baby Suggs and Sixo. This social stratification was pronounced in the two novels under discourse.

Sethe, the protagonist, was born in the South to an African mother she never knew, when she is thirteen, she is sold to the Garners, who own Sweet Home and practice a comparatively benevolent kind of slavery. There, the other slaves, who are all men, lust after her but never touch her. Their names are Sixo, Paul D, Paul A, Paul F, and Halle. Sethe chooses to marry Halle, apparently in part because he has proven generous enough to buy his mother's freedom by hiring himself out on the weekends. Together, Sethe and Halle have two sons, Howard and Buglar, as well as a baby daughter whose name we never learn. When she leaves Sweet Home, Sethe is also pregnant with a fourth child. After the eventual death of the proprietor, Mr. Garner, the widowed Mrs. Garner asks her sadistic, vehemently racist brother-in-law to help her run the farm. He is known to the slaves as schoolteacher, and his oppressive presence makes life on the plantation even more unbearable than it has been before. The slaves decide to run.

In *Beloved* the slaves become alienated from the society and live far away from the community. Like Sethe and her family are alienated from their community of slave-owners and they live in Cincinnati.

Moreover, the alienation of slave from each other is used by slave-owner to make slaves live partially and to avoid their unity. The unity of slaves or worker worries the owner because that can be threat for their superiority. Slave-owners tend to alienate the slaves in order to divide and conquer strategy they may want to use. But, what slave-owners are afraid of is unity among the slaves. Communal bonding among the slaves rises up and slaves planned to escape from Sweet Home Farm. No matter what slave-owners do to make relation between the slaves it is always broken after a certain time. This is what Marxist believes that someday lower class will get unity and make movement to free up themselves and become ruling class. In *Beloved*, the effort of slaves to get freedom depict in scene Denver rise up his brave to leave the house and ask for help.

After they killed baby girl, who is never given a proper name but is called “already crawling” also has an important role in the freeing of the family. Firstly, she is important as a motivator for Sethe to run away from the slave owner. Sethe couldn’t let her nor any of them live under the school teacher. That was out.

Sethe greatest fear is that her children will be treated as animals as she and the other slaves were under the school teacher’s control. Secondly, she is the motivator for Sethe not to give up during the most difficult parts of the escape as she has to reach to her baby with her life-giving milk. Thirdly, the baby’s death is the sacrifice that gives the rest of the family their freedom. Sethe is act of killing her daughter convinces the slave owner that she is insane. Consequently, he does not want any of them back, on a metaphorical level the interpretation could be that she is sacrificed to save her people. The reborn beloved’s role in freeing the family, or what is left of it is to make them recognize themselves as individual and to help them establish their place in society. The experience of slavery involves not only a lack of individual and ethical history but also according to Ayer Sitter “are the relationship between oppressed humans injural and disturbed by an internalization of oppressors values which can ever subvert the self”.

Morrison’s image for this internalization is in claiming that the unhappiness and violence in the slaves is not due to the “the jungle white folks planted in them”. Ayer Sitter goes even further in arguing that *Beloved* illustrates how every natural instinct and emotion is in some way twisted or stunted and emotion is in some way twisted or stunted by the experience of living in a culture that measures individual worth by resale value and the ability to reproduce oneself without cost.

The harm slavery did to the slaves minds are their appreciation of a true self, takes a long time to heal, and the process can probably not be accomplished in one generation although Morrison points out a way to start. *Beloved* takes away the burden of memory from Sethe’s shoulders that guilt has laid on her. This in turn, gives Sethe a possibility to plan and to recognize herself as an individual and to think about tomorrow, although not immediately.

After the ice pick attack on Mr. Bodwin and *Beloved*’s disappearance, Sethe is devastated and exhausted, not leaving her bed for weeks. Her eyes, fixed on the window, are so expressionless (Paul D) is not sure she will know who he is.

She tells Paul D that she has no plan for her self-esteem by claiming that they “need some kind of tomorrow” and that “you your best thing, Sethe you are” p.322. Sethe’s answer opens up for a new beginning “me? Me?” p.322. *Beloved* plays a totally different role in the freeing of Derver.

Due to the painful nature of the experience of slavery, most slaves repressed these memories in an attempt to leave behind a horrific past. This repression and dissociation from the past causes a fragmentation of the self and a loss of true identity. Sethe, Paul D. and Denver all experience this loss of self, which could only be remedied by the acceptance of the past and the memory of the original identities. In a way, *beloved* serves to open these characters up to their repressed memories, eventually causing the reintegration of their

selves (Koolish, 2001). Slavery splits a person into a fragmented figure. The identity, consisting of painful memories and unspeakable past, denied and kept at bay, becomes a 'self that is no self.'

All of the characters in *Beloved* face the challenge of an unmade 'self', composed of their 'rememories' and defined by perceptions and language. The barrier that keeps them from 'remaking' of the 'self' is the desire for an 'uncomplicated past' and the fear that remembering will lead them to 'a place they couldn't get back from' (Boudreau, 1995).

Marx and Engels (1948) state that the ruler (oppressor) and the ruled (oppressed) have been in a constant struggle with each other over the surplus value and this struggle can result in a revolutionary reconstitution of a society. This is also the case in *Paradise* when the Morgans who came from the generation of the founding fathers, took upon themselves to enact the rules and regulation of their community. The Morgans are a rich family and the founding patriarchs of Ruby town. Because they had money they oppress the entire community of Ruby town. One of the Morgan's brothers, simply called KD impregnates fifteen year old Arnette without any remorse knowing that he is backed up by his rich uncles (Deek and Steward). This makes Misner to ponder thus:"

*...A devious smile. Misner despise males who hit women-and a fifteen-year-old? What did KD think he was doing? His relationship with Deek and Steward protected him, of course, but it was hard to like a man who relied on that Servile to his uncles; brutal with females." p.62.*

Another instance of the rich oppressing the poor is when the people of Ruby town argued to change the motto of the oven. In this scenario, Morgan aggressively rejects any change and that is what is implemented:

*Morgan left the row and stood in the aisle. "well, sir, I have listened, and I believe I have heard as much as I need to. Now, you all listen to me, real close. Nobody, I means nobody, is going to change the Oven or call it something strange. Nobody is going to mess with a thing our grandfathers built. They made each and every brick one at a time with their own hands"... As could have been predicted, Steward had the last word- or at least the words they all remembered as last because they broke the meeting up. p.85-87*

Knowing that he had acquired a "rulership" status, Steward Morgan controlled members of his community with iron hand this can be noted in the following threat to the youths of Ruby town:

*If you, any one of you, ignore, change, take away, or add to the words in the mouth of the Oven, I will blow your head off just like you was a hood-eye snake. p.87.*

## Conclusion

Slavery is not only necessarily seen through the physical actions individual commit but also through items that recollect remorseful events. It is important to consider this as physical object can represent slavery and allow its development to continue for significant periods of time ultimately allowing social groups to become more dominant. As these progresses, clear distinction, regarding power advances and it is seen in the two novels as this causes a major gaps between superior and unsuperior groups. The slaves are considered as lower class and slaves owner who has economic power as upper class. The Marxist perspective view slavery from the capitalist angle, freedom is view from the enslaved character to escape and to free themselves up.



Communication in this era is deference with pre-capitalist and in co modifying person or labour. Recent capitalist focuses in exchange value or sign exchange value, as stated in (Tyson, 2006). Communication is the act of relating to objects or persons in terms of their exchange vale or sign-exchange value.

Otherwise in pre-capitalist era, communication involves person or human being as object as commodity. Slave-owners may sell their slaves to the others by certain number of money and can be used to fund their farm development. This happens in *Beloved* and can be seen when slave owner make bargain each other in number of money. The communication makes the slaves feel alien in their lives. Of course it fences their relationship among the society they involved. They limit their relationship with each other, even their family because the alienation caused by communication. They are afraid when attached to someone in their live; the person will be taken away from them because the slave owner sells them to the others that may be in different places. This alienation is stated by Karl Marx and it happens in capitalist society as stated in (Tyson, 2006) that the labour dissociated from their own labour as well and the society as a whole.

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