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**Realistic Depiction of Postcolonial Society in Toni
Morrison's *Beloved***

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Dedication

First of all ,we are extremely grateful to Allah who helped us to finish this paper .

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Magical realism as a dominant literary device in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* can be considered as a decolonizing agent in a postcolonial context. Morrison's narrative in *Beloved* takes the advantage of both realism and magic to challenge the assumptions of an authoritative colonialist attitude and so can be alleged as a powerful and efficient method to project the postcolonial experience of African-American ex-slaves in the United States. It can also provide an alternate point of view of reality and history to attacks the solidity of Eurocentric definitions and as a consequence to portray the hidden and silenced voices of numerous enslaved generations of African-American in the history of United States.

The present study attempts to explore magical realism's decolonizing role in Morrison's *Beloved*. In pursuing this goal it will trace the narrative and thematic strategies of magical realism that highlight the novel as an essential text of postcolonial literature.

Introduction

Postcolonial Realism

Colonialism transforms and displaces everything. Through this process, traditions, beliefs and cultural standards of the imperial canon are forced upon all of their subjects who find no choice but to accept these new ways of life. This is where the displacement of their traditional culture begins. And as a beginning and to create a channel of communication between the colonizer and the colonized, the colonized subjects learn how to speak the settlers' language, and bit by bit, they find themselves mixing their native language with that of the colonizer because of the brutal encounter with the colonizer who introduces his language either through education or through subverting the colonized and forcing him to learn his language in order to communicate with him .¹

After a very long time of experiencing suffering and a brutal contact with the colonizer, the colonized find themselves unconsciously incorporating aspects of the colonial ways in their original identity. Furthermore, one of the ways which the colonizers use to control their colonies, and change their national identities is education; they control the thoughts and ideas held by the younger generation through implanting colonial ideologies in their minds. As a matter of fact, the original culture and identity for the coming generation are lost in the new world order .²

During the process of decolonization, postcolonial subjects attempt not only to free their lands but also to free their cultures. Once, independence regained the process of post colonialism

begins; what is left of the original cultural identity of the native people then starts to be explored and the newly acquired identity starts to be analyzed. This subject of the quest for identity and the attempt to figure out the value of the new identity is deeply explored in postcolonial literature. Postcolonial literature comes from the broadest term postcolonialism which deals basically with the period of colonialism and its aftermath. In addition, postcolonialism depicts the identity of the colonized society; it deals with the huge challenge of building a national identity following a harmful experience and how writers talk about and celebrate that identity, often reclaiming it from, and maintaining strong connections with the colonizer. They do it through producing a literature that debates cultural identity and criticizes the change that occurred during colonization and in the present state of the postcolonial societies. Postcolonial literature deals with the cultural change that occurred in the postcolonial societies and led to a cross-cultural state in literature and society.³

Throughout the recent years, magical realism has become a popular term which refers to a particular narrative mode that provides a way to discuss alternative approaches to reality to that of Western philosophy, expressed in many postcolonial and non-Western works of contemporary fiction. The popularity of magical realist fiction in English in postcolonial nations has promoted a debate on the suitability of magical realism as a postcolonial strategy of writing. Stephen Slemon in his influential article “Magic Realism as Post-Colonial Discourse”, calls on a mixture of postmodernist assumptions to claim that magical realism is able to express a number of postcolonial elements. He draws attention to the production of binarism and dualities operating in settler cultures that foreground the “gaps, absences and silences produced by the colonial encounter”.⁴

Magical realism, at least in a literary context, seems most visibly operative in cultures situated at the fringes of mainstream literary traditions”. Slemon explains that there are two discourses in the magical realist narrative that each of them has a different perspective: the magical and the real. To him neither of the two is dominant but there is a continuous tension and resistance between them. According to him, this structure reflects the tension between the ever-present and ever-opposed colonized and colonialist discourses in a postcolonial context in which the narrative structure reflects the relationship between the two, so that the “texts

recapitulate a postcolonial account of the social and historical relations of the culture in which they are set”.⁵

Postcolonial imagination here means go back in the colonial era where cultural and political ideologies was practiced both willingly and forcefully by the white masters, its consequences leads to slavery. Postcolonial writers and thinkers expose these practices by using imaginative narrative technique. The African novel is in fact a very striking example of postcolonial literature since it explores the struggle for the quest of identity. And it is for sure quite obvious that Ngugi wa Thiong'o is one of these writers who explore this notion at length. Through his writings he explores the features that forge the postcolonial African identity such as hybridity, Otherness, displacement and language .⁶

Postcolonial African writers employ magical realism in their literary works as an effective alternative to the realist mode used in the past. It serves to capture what may seem unbelievable to Western sensibilities but real to indigenous understanding, as well as open the way to a world of limitless possibilities. In fact in postcolonial Africa the magnitude of vices like corruption, despotism, dictatorship, and electoral frauds, defies human imagination; even the sacredness of life is violated by the carnage that is the result of the gratuitous violence that characterizes socio-political relations in postcolonial Africa .⁷

Magical realism has become important as a powerful means of expression worldwide, especially in countries formerly under colonial yoke, and which are still struggling to achieve real political and economic independence, because it has provided the literary ground for significant political criticism. It transcends the limitations that prevent realism from reaching interpretive closure. In fact, it serves as an alternative to the now blunt realist mode, thereby affording writers an incommensurable device for more effective representation of the economic, social, and political realities in the aforementioned countries. ⁸

What makes magical realism more convenient for Postcolonial African magical realist writers is their belief that the fantastic, the supernatural and even the magic should be allowed in our attempt to fully interpret the socio-political situation in postcolonial Africa, because not only

they believe that realism has shown its limits in its representation of the world but they also think that it is foreign to the socio-political milieu it is it attempts to represent .⁹

Realistic Depiction of Postcolonial Society in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Toni Morrison, an African-American writer, whose fifth novel, *Beloved*, has been described as one of the most prominent texts to emerge out of the African-American literary tradition. She is concerned with the concept of blacks as marginalized and black literature as the non-canonical literature and tries to redefine white/black hierarchy of mainstream discourse, a discourse which always has undermined black's existence in the construction of American literature and culture .¹⁰

Reclaiming the past from the oppressive history of slavery has been one of the defining features of Toni Morrison's novels. The quest for a cultural identity on the part of the recently emancipated subject has evoked a rewriting of the past and of forgotten communal histories. This reclamation has been achieved through the process of (re) constructing those erased ethnic and cultural traditions. Toni Morrison's novels acknowledge the restorative power of folklore and its importance in counteracting colonial hegemony's cultural denial. Moreover, Morrison's fiction restores a subject position to the victims of slavery by re-animating the voices of the silenced. While postcolonial theory has gone a long way towards addressing the problem of the silenced Other, nonetheless, very little attention has been paid to the postcolonial significance of the American slave narrative .¹¹

Morrison's narratives register the historical experience of resistance against slavery, a theme which one finds in the works of novelists as diverse as Alice Walker, Paule Marshall, Renee Green, and Louis Edwards. Like her contemporary African American writers, Morrison

exposes the self-asserting and self-deluding mechanisms of racism. Stories included in African-American fiction become methods through which the formerly colonized people assert their identities against colonial hegemony. The stories included in Morrison's texts offer narratives of emancipation that work to enlighten the colonized people against different forms of racist subjection.¹²

Belove , for example, includes the story of the mother who killed her daughter in refusing to give her back to slavery. By reanimating the voices of the silent (the voice of the mother who killed and that of the slaughtered daughter who comes back from the dead to haunt the mother), Morrison leads the reader to relive the past experience of slavery. Morrison's narratives explore the methods through which the formerly colonized people are still considered inferior and who occupy a less important role in the world. A postcolonial mode of analysis is important in illustrating the colonial themes that are dominant in Morrison's novels.¹³

Beloved is written from the marginal point of view of African-Americans who do not have social and political power. It is the story of Sethe, an ex-slave, who grieves the fact that she murdered her baby girl in order to save her from a life of slavery. She mourns so much that her grief becomes manifest into a body of a young woman named Beloved, a ghost in the beginning, the same age that Sethe's dead baby would have been had she lived. The presence of two opposing discursive systems of magic and real in *Beloved* can reflect the tensions between the colonized and colonizer discourses in a postcolonial context. Applying postcolonial terminology, realism represents the hegemonic discourse of the colonizer while magic refers to the strategy of opposition and resistance used by the colonized .¹⁴

Magical realism can also provide a way to fill in the gaps of cultural representation in a postcolonial context by recovering the fragments and voices of forgotten histories from the point of view of the colonized. In other words, magical realism may serve as the transformative decolonizing project of imaging alternative histories. The magical realism of Morrison's text by addressing historical issues critically and in so doing attempting to heal historical wounds, not only can reflect history, it may also seek to change it. Thus, *Beloved* can be read as a postcolonial historiographic intervention, a strategic re-centering of American history in the lives

of the African- Americans who are historically dispossessed .¹⁵

Beloved is a story based on African-American slave Margaret Garner escaped from slavery during 1856 in Kentucky by running to Ohio a free state . Margaret killed her two daughter when her owner came to get her back to the Sweet Home. She killed her daughter because she did not want her daughter should grow up as a slave like her. The present novel portraits experiences of ‘otherness’ during slavery and even post-slavery period. Sethe a mother and major character in the novel reveals her life and struggle for the self identity. *Beloved* is a combination of both psychological and physical violence. Throughout the novel, we find feeling of alienation and deprivation where Sethe talks about not only the past of Sethe but of all the black peoples. is of two types, one during the time of colonial time where slavery practiced freely in which the black body was property of white masters and a second one is past slavery where they were free to think and act. They lost their consciousness during the period of slavery and lost the ‘self’.¹⁶

Here Morrison takes Sethe’s dead daughter who came back to the life as a birth metaphor. *Beloved* is a symbol of slavery, her birth also symbolises reoccurring structure of slavery. She conveys how slavery is deeply rooted in society and blacks were denied as a human being. Women were marginalised and even triple binded under white dominance and mythology. This novel is a fine example of imaginative realism in which all historical realities are given boldly and dig out the political, religious and cultural practices in colonial and postcolonial America. Morrison here narrates the story of Sethe and her dead daughter *Beloved* very skilfully and reveals historical truth to readers. It reflects tension between the coloniser and the colonized

.¹⁷

The style of the novel unfolds the hegemonic discourse used by the white-dominance to maintain the power over the black people and let them in slavery continuously. Magic realism helps to exposes forgotten aspect of the history and the culture. It decolonises the history of African-American black people. It means *Beloved* is a reading of African-American history. Imperialism creates dominance over imperial world which affects the several aspects of colonized people. For example; culture, history, politics, language, art and so on. Western values have rooted along with imperialism. Native culture and the history reflected in different

discourse is Eurocentric which hides realities of the colonial past, especially injustice, inequality and oppression by the white masters and identity of black was blurred even it is destroyed by meta -narrative of white dominance .¹⁸

Magic realism on the other hand, exposes a reality in the imperial and colonial era. It even gives way to express real emotions, passions, psyche of colonised people. Magic realism became a language of oppressed and marginalised people. Toni Morrison and other postcolonial writer used it to express colonised history. Postmodern historian denies historical truth, even they questions on the historical document and its reality. Truth in the history is truth created by people who were in power. The power means, socio-political, cultural, economical, and intellectual power, and only these people could tell the historical truth which was partial and half truth. Subaltern, black and oppressed was remained unspoken or unwritten. Historical and literary document denied existence and reflection of the black, subaltern, and non -European and created them negatively .¹⁹

Magical realism as a dominant literary mode in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* can be considered as a decolonizing agent in a postcolonial context. Morrison's narrative in *Beloved*, takes the advantage of both realism and magic to challenge the assumptions of an authoritative colonialist attitude and so can be alleged as a powerful and efficient method to project the postcolonial experience of African-American ex-slaves in the Unites States. It can also provide an alternate point of view to Eurocentric accounts of reality and history to attack the solidity of Eurocentric definitions and as a consequence to portray the hidden and silenced voices of numerous enslaved generations of African-Americans in the history of United States .²⁰

Notes

¹ Cheriet Asthma, "Postcolonial African Literature and the Identity Question- A Special Reference to Ngugi wa Thiongo's" *Ideological Pronouncements, literature and civilization*, 2014,p.7.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid ,p.8.

⁴ Mehri Razmi, "Magic(al) Realism as Postcolonial Device in Toni Morrison's Beloved". *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* Vol. 2 No. 5; March 2012, p.111.

⁵ Ibid ,p.112.

⁶ Cheriet Asthma, p.10.

⁷ Moussa Issifou , *Hybridizing Political Criticism in the Postcolonial African Novel: Magical Realism as Aesthetic of Necessity* (North Carolina : North Carolina University Press, 2012), p.6.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid,p.7.

¹⁰ Mehri Razmi,p.112.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid , p.113.

¹³ Abdullatif, Hanan, "Toni Morrison: Rethinking the Past in a Postcolonial Context" *Open Access Dissertations* ,1999, p.9.

http://digitalcommons.uri.edu/oa_diss/389

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid , p.10.

¹⁶ Madhav D. Pawar, "Postcolonial Imagination: History and Narration in Toni Morrison's", *Research Journal of Language, Literature and Humanities*, Vol. 4(2), 2017, p.8.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid,p.9.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Razmi , p.113.

Conclusion

Postcolonial literature deals with the cultural identity of the subaltern in colonized societies and also the dilemma of developing a national identity after colonial rule. These struggles of identity, history, and future possibilities are present in magical realist work of Toni Morrison. Introducing a magical character with a narrative voice, *Beloved* distorts the traditional conception of reality according to Eurocentric definitions.

Moreover, *Beloved* becomes the medium through which victims of the Middle Passage gain a literate voice. This functions as a narrative strategy of transgression since it allows for the voices of under- or un-represented. In this way *Beloved* can be understood as a writing back from the periphery. Accordingly, Morrison's work adds to the incomplete canon of American literature that has neglected the story of the silenced African-Americans who survived slavery. In a word, being dedicated to "Sixty million and more", *Beloved* is quite successful in memorializing a vast absence the words can never fill.

Then what postcolonial imaginative narrative or magic realism does is that it exposes all evils of white colonizers and even gives outlet, to the black people's emotions and thoughts. Magic realism narrative technique handles a huge responsibility to help postcolonial writers who creates awareness among blacks and subalterns to achieve them, a self-identity. Toni Morrison in her novel *Beloved* used magicrealism to reflect African –American history in which slavery is practised to control black people generation after generation. She tries to decolonise it and even she tries to reveal the historical truth but also regains self-essence or self-identity of black African in American.

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