

Psycho-politics in Morrison's *Beloved* and *Home*: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study is an attempt to examine Toni Morrison's two novels *Beloved* (1987) and *Home* (2012) based on Frantz Fanon's theory of "psycho-politics" in which he combines politics with psychology. The main focus has been on examining the effect of colonization on blacks physically and mentally. Black people are haunted by harsh memories from their past and thus they find it difficult to recover from the influence of the colonization. Traumatic past, consciousness, violence, and alienation are going to be discussed as results of slavery. Therefore, this paper will investigate slaves and their masters in order to clarify the experience of slavery. The harshness of the blacks' actions are based on psychological suppression of their past. Fanon's work provides awareness into the psychology of colonial oppression in dehumanized and oppressed communities. His criticism is interpreted through the understanding of power, violence and subordination and thus he examined the character of the black man or woman through the system of values in the white culture. Therefore, Fanon brings "politics into psychology" and "psychology into Politics" by analyzing power within a series of psycho-analytical conceptions.

Keywords: *Beloved*, *Home*, Morrison, post-colonialism, Psycho-politics

Introduction

The representation of cruelties which results from bondage and its psychological effect on the individual is represented in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and *Home* (2012). Morrison (1987) describes *Beloved* as a kind of "literary archaeology", which is applied to *Home* too, in that she aims to write the African- American history that others have missed (Parrish, 2008, p.126); while the archaeologist investigates through the debris of the past civilization in order to compose a view of how people used to live, Morrison, through historical records and memories, investigates both slaves and their owners in order to get sense of the experience of slavery as seen through ordinary people's lives. She is politically conscious of the meaning of enslavement. Besides, all the characters in the two novels suffer from psychological repression of their pasts and much of their pain is based on the horrors of slavery. Morrison (2012) pays attention to the political presentation of colonial relations between whites and blacks and thus the two novels can be interpreted in term of the relationship between post-colonial theory and critical psychology explained in psychiatric and revolutionary Frantz Fanon's definition of post-colonial theory through combining politics with psychology "psycho-politics".

Purpose

The critical psychology of the post-colonial helps us in realizing the fundamental relationship between post-colonial theory and critical psychology. After reading the two novels, it would be probable to analyze not only the post-colonial mind, but also bigotry and racism in general; just as Fanon defines post-colonial theory throughout the amalgamation between psychology and politics, in his well-known coinage of the concept "psycho-politics". The purpose of this paper is to apply Fanon's concept on Morrison's two novels *Home* (2012), and *Beloved* (1987) to prove the effect of colonization on the blacks' psyche that leads to psychological trauma and alienation.

Discussion

African Americans are driven to escape physically, yet denying that being physically free from slavery will not make them mentally free since they will be haunted by the past and will confront the horror of their actions wherever they go. *Beloved* is the story of an escaped slave, Sethe, who is trying to win freedom. However, she realizes that "freeing [herself] was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (p.95). Sethe suffers more psychological damage than any other character, and others would find themselves embroiled in her life. Because of the psychological trauma of her past, she is unable to find another solution instead of killing her daughter to protect her from slavery. On the other hand, *Home* is a story of African Americans after the Korean War when they were treated worse than "dogs". Although the novel follows Frank's post-war experience, his sister, Cee, is also a "victim of psychological trauma. Living among the white communities throughout the United States, African Americans try to find their own home in hope to have their identity. Cee was born on the road and her family were forced to leave their home and her grandmother considered this life as a "sinful, worthless life" (p.44).

When reading these novels, one can see the harsh way that readers would examine the behaviors of the characters, yet when burrowing deeper, it becomes easier to notice how the harshness of their actions are based on the psychological suppression of their past. All the characters have difficulty in finding peace of mind or in recovering from their memories. In

Beloved, Sethe's relationship with others and the memories of killing her daughter that haunt her cause a great pain that all the characters in the novel must fight to overcome as well as Frank Money, in *Home*, where a childhood trauma is represented when he and Cee were "just kids" playing in a field in Lotus, they watched the murder and burial of a black man where he was transferred to a hole in the ground by several white men." (3) Moreover, Frank has terrible memories of killing a Korean child which brings on a melancholic state of mind.

Psychology and post-colonialism

Psychology plays an important role in interpreting the dynamic of conflict situations and the psychological aspects are used in shaping social attitudes and political opinion. On the other hand, post-colonialism is based on interpreting events in societies in light of the historical colonial experience. In his interpretation of colonialism, Fanon (2007) links psychology and politics. He provides "a layered theoretical approach to the problems of black identity in racist / colonial contexts" where Fanon uses correlative theoretical interpretation to make a particular analytical frame to criticize aspects of different viewpoints of "colonial experience" (Hook, 2004, p.116). Fanon's work provides awareness into the psychology of colonial oppression in Algeria, and thus his theory can be generalized to interpret the plight of other colonially oppressed people. His analysis can be used to understand different communities that are dehumanized and oppressed.

By the same token, In *Black Skin White Masks*, Fanon refers to psychological formations as a way of emphasizing the 'identity trauma' of blackness in colonial context and as another way of expressing the persistence of the psychical components of racism. Fanon's criticism is interpreted through the understanding of power, violence and subordination and thus he examined the character of the black man or woman through the system of values of the white culture. Therefore, Fanon brings "politics into psychology" and "psychology into Politics" (Hook, 2004, p.86) by analyzing power within a series of psychoanalytical conceptions. The awareness of the colonial relationship between black and white helps the definition of racial identity which leads to alienation.

Morrison's novels present the political view of the author; it is noticeable that the colonized and colonizer relationship or in other words the blacks and the whites' relationship control the plot. The race of each character has a relation to its place in life. If a black person attack or kill a white one, the black must die. Furthermore, while the white has all of his rights; the black lives oppressed in a place of desolation. Morrison reflects a post-colonial sensitivity when she describes her writings as a kind of literary archaeology that depends on history and memories where she records diaries of slaves and owners in order to gain their experience through their lives. Morrison describes *Beloved* saying "The book is not about the institution-slavery with a capital S. It was about these anonymous people called slaves".

(Gordon, 1997, p.142). The novel is written through the flashbacks of the main characters and events told through different perspectives. It is about the harsh way that intervenes between the institution and the person by creating a possibility of creating a new life for the future. In *Home*, Morrison is not different when she presented women like Cee, Lilly, and others who are subjugated by colonial power; she portrays African Americans marginalized spiritually and physically in colonized societies. The same style as *Beloved*, It is the story of a man who has

awful flashbacks to war and the deaths of his two best friends besides his terrible memory of killing a Korean child.

Suicide and mood of anxiety disorders can be either as a result of the abuse patterns in the White American population, or as a result of unresolved grief. This leads people to hold mood of anxiety disorders and be at risk for brutal behaviors such as killing or committing suicide. Fanon applied his thoughts on colonialism; he believes that colonization can have harmful effects on the psyche and identity of the black people. Frank Money remembers when he was a kid and his family and neighbors were all kicked because they were Black. It was the most difficult time in their life when they were jobless and hopeless. His mother, Ida, was pregnant and he cannot forget the scene, "Mama cried, but the baby she carried was more important than kettles, canning jars, and bedding" (p.39). His mother gave birth to his sister Cee on the road. Segregation and dehumanization explain the mental illness in the Black population that causes alienation.

Alienation

Fanon uses the definition of racial alienation to give us "a way of thinking the connections- or articulations- between the internal world of the individual subject, and the external world of the constraining social, economic or political structures that surround and contain that Individual" (Duncan, 2004, p.67). Fanon studied Marx's concept of alienation since Fanon was Marxist, where Karl Marx used his concept to refer to the oppression that results from the division of the society into two classes. The upper class who owns the mean of productions and the lower class who works for wages. The person from the lower class is alienated from everything around even from himself or herself. For Marx, the proletarian revolution aimed to the abolition of classes. Similarly, Fanon (2008) emphasized the necessity of Negritude which calls for black consciousness. Like Marx, he thinks that people's thoughts and organization can lead to alienation. Fanon believes that race is a form of alienation; "The real world robbed us of our share. In the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. The image of one's body is solely negating. It's an image in the third person" (p.90). Fanon emphasizes the relation between whites and black that leads to alienation.

In *Beloved* all the characters are alienated since they are aware of their racial identity which leads them to escape physically, thinking that they will escape reality. Sethe is alienated physically and emotionally; she is alienated from her husband, children, society and most of all from herself. Her husband left her when they escaped from Sweet Home and her daughter became physically away from her when she killed her to escape slavery and when her two sons became afraid, they left her and thus she became alienated from society. Moreover her daughter, Denver, found refuge in the boxwood bushes in hope of feeling safe and secure. She suffered because of her mother's decision and has always been alone. Children don't dare to be with her since their house is haunted by the spirit of beloved. Her daughter beloved is emotionally alienated; she feels it is unfair to be killed instead of being loved by her mother.

Morrison clarifies alienation that results from the trauma of experiencing the black body as white property. *Beloved* works on physical and psychological levels in dealing with the body as well as psychological trauma. Morrison deals with the black body as the "other". For example, the novel is based on the psychological aftermath of rape and abuse. Sethe had been

attacked by two white boys who stole her milk, preventing her from feeding her daughter. "After I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk" (p.19). The milk which she keeps for her daughter is the most important possession for her and by losing it; she lost an important part of herself. The memory of the attack is repressed inside her mind, preventing her from moving on with her life which was full of terror that caused her to act rashly. Saving her daughter from facing the same fate drives her to kill beloved. Paul D, as well as Sethe, suffered psychological tragedies that brought him to a state of repression. His suffering comes as a result of Sethe's actions; she brings beloved into her home and she becomes a haunting figure for those who live around her.

Many psychologists think that the unconscious repression of the traumatic experience as sexual abuse is a defense mechanism. This terrible experience might be forgotten yet not forgiven; it lies in wait under consciousness causes an innumerable psychological and physical problem pushes to suicide. Morrison focuses on rape as evidence using to symbolize the psychological effect of all phases of slavery where Black people were not allowed to have a sense of individuality. Like other slaves, the characters are treated as if their lives have no value. They are properties and their masters use them at the whim without thinking of their rights as human beings. These slaves are not able to face the horror placed upon them; therefore, they turn to violence. Even if slaves are freed from a life of bondage, the psychological damage keeps them in a world where cure is difficult. The major characters in the novel suffer from sense of loss of the self are all working out of a deep loss to the self, a profound narcissistic wound that results from a breakdown and distortion of the earliest relations between self and other. In the case of *Beloved*, "the intense desire for recognition evolves into enraged narcissistic omnipotence and a terrifying, tyrannical domination" (Schapiro, 1995, p.130). Morrison's characters are trapped in their pasts where they can't heal. "The worst atrocity of slavery, the real horror the novel exposes, is not physical death but psychic death" (Schapiro, 1995, p.128). This kind of abuse causes a psychological damage and thus she focuses on rape as a symbol of psychological effects of all phases of slavery. Sethe and Paul suffer and struggle in hope to find themselves after talking about the past that they have tried many times to repress. Moreover, the desire of beloved to know herself is a cruel revenge that is meant to break Sethe for what she has done. The problem that all Morrison's characters face in order to decide who they are is a symbol for the psychological conflict that slaves confront when trying to identify with themselves. In *Home*, Morrison represents the loss of self and identity throughout the fragmentation of the family; she shows how the post-colonial family cannot give the caring atmosphere that is important to the development of the child's psyche.

Both novels depict the economic system of capitalism and the damaging, harmful effects on colonized societies besides the hypocrisy of the colonizer in term of flourishing the economic system of the colonized countries. For gaining money, Cee had to work for a white doctor who did an experiment on her womb that caused her infertility and she was ignored because of restrictions regarding race. Even Frank mocked the name of his family "Money" that they never had. Morrison blames capitalism and imperialism for the human catastrophe and the pain of the slave.

By the same token, Fanon (2007) states:

I came into the world anxious to uncover meaning in things, my soul desirous to be at the origin of the world, and here I am an object among other objects. Locked in this suffocating reification, I appealed to the Other so that his liberating gaze, gliding over my body suddenly smoothed of rough edges, would give me back the lightness of being I thought I had lost, and taking me out of the world put me back in the world. But just as I get to the other slope I stumble, and the other fixes me with his gaze, his gestures and attitude, the same way you fix a preparation with a dye. I lose my temper, demand an explanation....Nothing doing. I explode (p.89).

Fanon (2007) asserts the relationship between the white supremacy and the black; this relationship appears when the black "experience his being for others" (p.89). He argues that one becomes aware of the time when others determine his identity. In *Home*, Frank's sense of alienation is provoked by the bad memories of his childhood, his loss of his lover, his participation in the war and racism which he still experiences. All these memories represent a continuation of emotional deprivation. In the epigraph, the speaker said "Why does its lock fit my key?" this shows the alienation from his desolate home. Frank represents the lack of insecurity and identity of the black community. Another incident was a little Korean girl whom was shot dead by Frank who had come to steal food from the dump. This girl reminded him of himself and Cee as young children crawling through the high grass.

A great part of childhood's growth lies in the psychological relationship between children and their mothers. Once this relation disappears, children are psychologically damaged. Therefore, it becomes hard to define themselves and to find their identity. Although Frank and Cee are not abandoned, they are left to their grandparents to take care of who in their role neglected them. Luther and Ida also did not take a good care too although their parents love them. In fact, the harsh life prevented them from performing their duties as good parents. On the other hand, in *Beloved*, the relation between Sethe and *beloved* explores the psychological relation between mothers and their children. Since slaves are considered as property, the significance of families is not in the consideration when mothers are sent for any place to work. Children are detached from their mothers causing a trauma that is impossible to heal. Morrison pays attention to this trauma and the psychological effect it leaves on the characters. *Beloved's* lack of identity drives her to burrow into Sethe's past. She enjoys listening to Sethe's stories since they give her a sense of understanding. She gains a new closeness to Sethe that she has never experienced. Therefore, slavery drives for the separation of families, making it impossible for the children to gain a real connection which is essential to the psychological development.

Neurotic reaction

The main focus of Fanon's psychoanalytic attentions is "the juxtaposition of white and black races of colonization" (Hook, 2004, p. 117). He suggests that both the colonizer and the colonized exist within the grab of a "massive psycho-existential complex" that has various psychological effects. He looks at the embodied desire that motivates dreams and he finds that there is a simple wish, he asks: "what does the black man want?" and answers: "the black man wants to be white". Desire is interpreted in reference to Freud definition of neuroses that leads to irrational behaviors and beliefs. The "neuroses of blackness", as Fanon puts it, is the dream of turning white. The symptoms of neuroses come as a result of psychical trauma; traumatic racist violence or abuse is a common place in colonial environment. Sethe doesn't have the ability to

fulfill her dreams through being treated like white people or to adapt to her own environment after she has experienced violence and abuse which leads her to escape.

Sethe suffers from what is called 'neuroses', mental disorder, that is engendered by colonial or imperial experience which leads her to behave in an abnormal way. Fanon interprets the psychological aftermath of imperialism by examining the 'neurotic reactions' and "investigates the extent to which the conclusion of Freud or of Adler can be applied to the effort to understand the man of color's view of the world" (Fanon, 2008, p.141). Therefore, he applied Freud's notion of neurosis as a "conflict between ego and its id" to an imperial context for the understanding of a deleterious state of the self. On the other hand, in Lacan's interpretation of neuroses "the repressed reappears in loco where it was repressed" (Lacan, 2013, p.105). Thereby, the neuroses epitomize the post-colonial condition as it restructures the appearance of the repressed. Neuroses as a social phenomenon represses a certain experience and represents "an incapacity to confront this secretly preserved part of reality" (Lacan, 2013, p.45). In its wide concept, neurosis works as a tool to describe the human experience of the colonizer and the colonized.

What causes 'neuroses', according to Freud, is a repressed memory. Sethe is more than a repressed memory; she is a representation for the community. Not only do her behaviors symbolize not only her remorse, but also the suffering of slaves at that time. Slaves confronted great brutality and thus Morrison concentrates on sexual assault as the most horrifying form of abuse. Because of this abuse, Morrison's characters stuck in their past, incapable to move from the psychological damages that they have experienced. The same case is in *Home*, Frank's two friends Mike and Stuff were killed in the war. Frank thinks himself responsible for their death since he believes that he failed in saving them and thus feeling of guilt consistency haunted him. In his famous passage of *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon discusses the dreams of colonized people as he states: "I dream I am jumping, swimming, running, climbing; I dream that I burst out laughing, that I span a river in one stride [...]. During the period of colonization, the native never stops achieving his freedom from nine in the evening until six in the morning" (Enns, 2007, p.1). These dreams that challenge the limitations of the reality of colonization; the dreams they wish to make real. Later, he imagines a rebellion of the slave: "we were running like madmen, shoots rang out..... We were striking where the shouts came from, ... as burned the structures of the colonizer, ' the flames flickered sweetly on our cheeks." Thus, it may be safe to claim that the physical violence is a revolution of the mind which is ignored by the colonizer, the mind of the colonized will turn to visions and imagery of violence.

In *Beloved*, violence rise from oppression and slavery. Morrison intends to represent violence as a response of the predominantly white culture. Sethe is abused, by the whites and thus murdering her daughter is a kind of reflection of what she has experienced. Killing one's own child, no doubt, is the worst crime; nobody would accept the idea of a mother murdering her child. However, Morrison states in *Beloved*, "Definitions belong to the definers- not the defined". This means that the reader must look for the specific definition for the act. Here, Sethe is the mother who is justified in killing her daughter to *beloved* to feel the terror of being enslaved, therefore, she breaks the archetypal mother, the loving and caring one to allow different viewpoints on maternity.

All the characters in the novel struggle with the psychological suppression of the past. Kubler-Rosse's (2011) study shows that a person goes through five stages when he approaches death or after the death of someone who is dear to him: First, "Denial and Isolation", then "Anger", "Bargaining", "Depression" until one reaches "Acceptance". These stages can be applied on Sethe; although it takes time to accept her daughter's death, at the end of the novel she reaches "the final stage of acceptance". The same thing is for Frank; the girl whom he killed touched his Crotch and he shot the girl, later he accepts that he killed her because she aroused his desire saying "how could I let her live after she took me down to a place I didn't know was in me?" (p.134) Frank's trauma process leads him to accept the truth that he is the one who killed her, not his comrade.

Talking about traumatic past, we also have to look at Sethe's effect on the others, especially those who are around her and who suffered from their relation to her. For example, Paul D has become a victim of rape at the hand of beloved and what links him to beloved is his relation to Sethe. According to Denver, she did not have the intimate connection that she needed to satisfy her life. Because Sethe has focused on beloved, she destructs her connection to Denever. Excluded from *Beloved*-Sethe past, Denver is forced into the role of the outside other, and assuming that role is her salvation" (Schapiro, 1995, p.139). Denever is not a part of Sethe and beloved past. Beloved suffers physically and psychologically by being killed to be protected and by doing so; she loses her identity and does not have the chance to have it. When she comes back to her mother's life, she returns as a grown woman who is still influenced by the past, she has the mentality of a little child.

Beloved brings out her repressed feelings; she wants to connect herself to her mother in order to renew the pain that Sethe caused for her; she wants to break and weaken her mother and let her feel the guilt that she suffered to forget. Whenever beloved become stronger, Sethe becomes weaker. The mother wants to give love for her daughter in order to free herself from the feeling of guilt and remorse.

Black consciousness

Since black consciousness is a mental attitude, Biko (1987) finds that one of the effective tools against racism is black solidarity (p.65). By solidarity black people could gain psychological liberation which produces the rejection of the white societies' values. Fanon and Steve Biko were founding members of organization which served the foundation of black consciousness in North and South African and the Caribbean. Biko (1987) states:

Black Consciousness seeks to show the black people the value of their own standards and outlook. It urges black people to judge themselves according to these standards and not to be fooled by white society who have white-washed themselves and made white standards the yardstick by which even black people judge each other. (p.30).

Therefore, Black Consciousness refers to the actions and ideas that appeared in the late 1960s and early 1970s, to unite Black people to oppose apartheid and white supremacy. Racial solidarity is the technique towards the liberation of black people. Accordingly, Black consciousness, as Hook (2004) argues, is an "effective solidarity" technique, and a "commitment of love" (p.32). Morrison illustrates the need of the character to the support and help of the

community in which they live, in order to survive. Sethe starts to form her sense of self throughout the twenty-eight days after being a part of the Cincinnati community. Paul D and his fellow in prison escape by working together; they are tied to one another as Paul D remembers that "if one lost, all lost". This community is the same one that saves Sethe. Cincinnati's black community has a significant role in 124. At the end of the novel, the black community gathers at 124 to drive Beloved out and by doing so, the Blacks secure Sethe and release her from the past. The damage happened to their psyche cannot be erased because they can't change their past. However, they can change and repair themselves by finding their lost characters which can be achieved by looking at the knowledge inside their minds and bringing it to their awareness.

Just like in *Beloved*, healing throughout the community is clear in *Home* but in a way that is different from it. Frank's return to Lotus, is impossible without the solidarity of his people who afford him not just money, clothes and food but also empathy. Moreover, Cee takes advantage of the community's power to recover from trauma; "they didn't waste their time or the patient's with sympathy and they met the tears of the suffering with resigned contempt". A strong woman in Lotus takes care of Cee telling Frank to be away from her. This woman and others in the same community strengthen her and she becomes a new Cee who will never need rescue.

Conclusion

Based on the above discussion in Morrison's two novels, it may be concluded that psychology is a part of post-colonial theory. The historical traumas result from colonization and slavery lead to psychological traumas that remain latent. Fanon links Psychology and politics in his term (psycho-politic) to clarify effect of colonial violence on the mind and behaviors of the colonized. He brings psychology into politics by analyzing racism throughout psychoanalytic conceptualization. Therefore, colonization comes in its broad definition which is 'colonizing the mind' as many critics suggest. All the characters in the novels suffer from psychological damage that drives them to act in an unstable way. In both novels this is the history of slavery, racism, infanticide, but this also shows the effect of slavery and the related events on the human psyche. The system of slavery not only exhausts the blacks physically, but also shatters them spiritually.

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