

UNIVERSITE GASTON BERGER DE SAINT-LOUIS
UFR DE LETTRES ET SCIENCES HUMAINES
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THE MULTIDIMENSIONALITY OF THE
WOMAN'S VICTIMHOOD IN TONI
MORRISON'S *BELOVED* AND BESSIE
HEAD'S *A QUESTION OF POWER*.

Mémoire de Maîtrise

Présenté par :
Aminata Kamara Mbadji

Sous la direction de :
Dr Obododimma Oha

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INTRODUCTION

0.0 - PRELIMINARIES

The issue of women's victimization has seriously been raised recently in Africa by both female and male writers/critics. Women appeared first in male writings according to Carole Boyce Davies in a "series of flat images based primarily on the ways in which they identified with or supported men" (*Black Women Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, 32). Indeed, women were assigned stereotyped roles such as loving mothers, well-behaved wives, shrewish stepmothers, in early African literature. Some writers even visualized Africa as a "full-bellied maternal homeland", hence its metaphorical name "Mother Africa" (Pam Morris, 179).

Nevertheless, female characterization would be more realistic in later works. In Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* for example, the main female character Beatrice, symbolizes women's social, economic and political struggles. Her naming a baby girl, against the patriarchal social norms, "Aimechina" (may-the-path-never-close) is the embodiment of hope first for women but also for Africa itself. But women's experience was different in some areas such as South Africa.

In addition to the black male sexist domination, females had to live in a white racialized society. Across the ocean, African American women lived the same fate. The black man who suffers a lot in a segregationist white society, may bring home his bitterness and revolt. Consequently, wife and children may turn in scapegoats. The mother receives heavy beatings on trivial grounds and daughters are sometimes raped by their fathers.

With the bloom of Black Consciousness, resulting in the Civil Rights Movement, black women realized that female issues were moulded in male claims. Male activists "publicly acknowledged that they expected black women

involved in the movement to conform to a sexist role pattern" and that the "black woman was victimized by sexist and racist oppression", was perceived "as insignificant, for woman's suffering however great could not take precedence over male pain" (Bell Hooks, *AIN'T I A WOMAN?*, 5-6). Then, women were considered part of a racial entity fighting for its rights.

Female writers who dared voice their mind about sexist segregation within the movement were castigated. Nonetheless, some have gone through the obstacles and explored female conditions of livings in Africa and America. Among them are Toni Morrison and Bessie Head.

Before proceeding with the discussion, a number of terms used in this dissertation must be explained at this point. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, a victim is a "person who suffers, as a result of other people's actions". And to victimize someone means to "cause someone to suffer unfairly". Thus, we can have both racial and gender victimization intertwined. Then, victimhood is the state of the person who suffers from victimization.

As for gender, the concept itself appeared in the seventies. It refers to a socially acquired behaviour and aspirations which distinguish femininity from masculinity. In fact, the difference between gender and sex is in terms of social and biological categories. Gender stands for a sexual difference in terms of social and cultural construction in a community. Thus gender victimhood stems from patriarchal social hierarchy and results in the depreciation of the females' real value. Further, for Pam Morris "female" is used as "designating biological sex", feminine "as referring to cultural conceptions of gender" and feminist as "involving political perceptions and aims" (*Literature and Feminism*, 2).



0.1- STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM, OBJECTIVES AND RELEVANCE OF THE STUDY

Female subjection has been presented in African literature by many writers. Bessie Head, in her novel *A Question Of Power* (1973) for instance, gives an account of disorientation and paranoia in which the main character, however, strong-willed, survives. This character is haunted by the risk of hereditary madness and suffers a lot from being a coloured. Compared to her torturers, Dan and Sello, she is a meaningless victim like Sethe, the female protagonist in Morrison's *Beloved* (1987).

Despite Sethe's escape from slavery, she is haunted by its inheritance. She lives the life of a doubly enslaved: slave of marriage and slave by history. Pursued by her former masters and committed to preventing her children from reliving her fate, she kills one of her daughters before being stopped. Sethe's victimhood is emphasized by her husband's disappearance whereas Elizabeth, the protagonist in *A Question Of Power*, is martyred by the community's constant retelling of her mother's madness in addition to her hybridity.

The study then has to explore and analyse women's victimization in Morrison's *Beloved* and Head's *A Question Of Power*. It has appeared necessary to us because, on the one hand, Bessie Head deserves more attention than she has been given in the African literary scene and on the other, Toni Morrison represents one of the most significant writers on female psychological conditions among African Americans. The two of them have become prominent with their complex novels on women's experiences.

Our intention is to contribute to the general understanding of the works and furthermore, highlight the psychological conditions of oppressed women. On the basis of historical, theoretical and fictional frameworks, the project aims at

exploring the various levels of women's victimhood in South Africa and America described in the two novels. In addition, as modest as may be our effort, it is aimed at contributing to the understanding and improvement of women's living conditions.

0.2- DESCRIPTION OF THE NOVELS IN RELATION TO OTHER WORKS BY HEAD AND MORRISON

Actually, Bessie Head's novels, seen together, constitute a trilogy. *When Rain Clouds Gather* (1969) is about the first steps of an exile in the life of his adopted village. *Maru* (1971), the second novel, is the story of Margaret Cadmore, a young woman who belongs to an enslaved ethnic group called "Basarwa " or "bushman". The novel is nothing but a web of male chauvinism. Women are voiceless and the author denounces their objectification. She shows us that segregation and racism do not only belong to white communities. Blacks may be sometimes very cruel and tyrannical to the enslaved and hybrids.

The third novel, *A Question Of Power* (1973), is the extension of the previous ones. Indeed, the torturers of Margaret in *Maru*, Moleka and Maru, become Dan and Sello. They persecute Elizabeth up to her sleep. Her life is a perpetual nightmare in which the manicheistic view (good-evil) is noticeable. As a result, she experiences mental breakdown.

As for Toni Morrison, she has produced rich fictional works. Her novel *The Bluest Eye* (1970), is the story of a young black girl, Pecola Breedlove, who prays every night for blue eyes. She is convinced that with them, she would be so pretty that everything would be different: people would start looking at her and all the problems her father's drunkenness brings about would be stopped. Her runaway brothers would at last settle down and her mother would stop suffering. Unfortunately, she has no blue eyes and the first person to notice her, is her drunkard father, who rapes her. She will end drowning her desires in madness.

In addition, Morrison has published *Sula* (1974) which is the chronicle of the life of two black women from their growing up in a small Ohio town to their final clash. Sula, the eponymous character, is depicted as a rebel. She rejects the social norms of the community: to live in a small town, to marry and to become a

mother; whereas Nel, her childhood friend, has accepted them. After an exile, Sula returns as an unconventional young woman who does not hesitate to sleep with her best friend Nel's husband to affirm her emancipation from the socio-cultural norms of morality and decency. Sula and Nel embody the fight and survival of black American women.

In *Song Of Solomon* (1978), Macon Dead Jr (Milkman), the son of the richest black family in a mid-western town, is the first black allowed to be born at Mercy Hospital. He grows up in affluence and overshadows his self-effaced mother and sisters. His strongly adventurous nature leads us from mystery to revelation. *Tar Baby* (1981) is a love affair between a black female, imbued with white culture and a black man who characterizes her desires and fears. It is about the relationships between blacks and whites, blacks and blacks, women and men. Toni Morrison has revisited black female and male psyche in *Beloved* (1987), she deepens her quest within black consciousness.

The main character, Sethe, takes pleasure in recalling her memories of Sweet Home, her ancient masters' house with Paul D, a former slave comrade. She gives a wandering girl a home before knowing that she is the daughter she killed eighteen years ago. And from then on, all her life will be tied to that of her daughter who has returned as a grown-up from the spirit world.

Morrison's sixth publication is the perfect manifestation of manicheism through themes such as: physical and spiritual love, slavery and freedom, masculinity and femininity etc. The plot is centered on three points in *Jazz* (1992): passion, jealousy and murder. Her recent publication, *Paradise*, is about the life in a newly found town by freed black slaves, where anyone who wants to settle must have enough resources to live with during two years. Thus, exclusion is the basic principle of the town.

Then, *Beloved* shares many a point with Morrison's other texts, particularly black life in a white system and female oppression in a patriarchal

society. She states in an interview:

I have been rescuing [the dead girl] from the grave of time and inattention..Her fingernails may be in the first book; face and legs, perhaps, the second time. Little by little bringing her back into life (Gloria Naylor, 593).

Beloved' s difference lies on the moving description and analysis of female reception of sufferings in a white male-dominated society during slavery in addition to the story's being grounded on real life.

0.3 – JUSTIFICATION FOR THE CHOICE OF DATA

The issue of female victimhood has been already developed by writers like Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker in African American literature.

Zora Neale Hurston has described all the abuses put on women in proslavery America: hard labor, separation from children and mates, humiliating treatment by the white women and rape in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937). Nanny, after having seen all her ambitious future plans on her daughter shattered by a rape, sees another chance in her grand daughter born from the forced intercourse: Janie. But fearing her blooming womanhood, she warns her:

Honey, de white man is de ruler of everything as fur as Ah been able tuh find out ...de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his women folks. De nigger woman is de mule uh de world so fur as Ah can see (14).

In *The Color Purple* (1982), Alice Walker describes marriage as the sale and purchase of women who are considered mere things. They endure rape and are devalued partners because of the common belief, in the novel, according to which, women do not have a healthy mind. To illustrate that, Albert, a male character, states to his wife: "who you think you is?... You black, you pore, you ugly, you a woman. Goddam ,... you nothing at all" (187).

Besides, African novelists also have joined in denouncing female victimization. One of the most active is Buchi Emecheta. In a *Second Class Citizen* (1974) for instance, Francis is described as a hanger-on living and studying, or pretends, thanks to Adah's earning. But this does not prevent him from parading with authoritative manners and behaviour. *The Joys Of Motherhood* (1979) is a caricature of a woman who sacrifices herself for her male children hoping that they will sustain the family later . But, she will just see

her daughters even if their help is minor because they did not complete their education. In fact, the elder's dowry was hardly negotiated to provide Oshia's (Nnu Ego's elder son) school fees. Unfortunately for his mother, once in Britain, he forgets them and refuses to come back. Anyhow, women's victimization has been portrayed in many novels among which are those itemized earlier.

However, our choice of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Bessie Head's *A Question Of Power* is made because the theme of female victimhood is so powerfully portrayed in them. Indeed, Sethe and Elizabeth are victims of physical and spiritual harassment and their psychological resources do not suffice, so they both experience mental break. Somehow, all these have already been described and analyzed in other works. But the psychic reception of such sufferings is not treated as significantly as in *Beloved* and *A Question Of Power*.

Moreover, Bessie Head in calling her work almost autobiographical tells us that she has made a mere re-examination and rework of her own life. Actually, *A Question Of Power* is made of painful events which occurred in her life. Similarly, *Beloved* is grounded on historical records. It has been demonstrated that many black mothers preferred to terminate their offspring's life rather than letting them live the atrocities of slavery. Hence, our interest has been straightened by the coincidence between the situation in the texts and the situation in lived reality.

0.4- ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

To better deal with the multiple dimensions of woman's victimhood in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Bessie Head's *A Question Of Power*, we have planned five chapters.

The first chapter states the problem, explains the significance of the study, and announces its objectives. As well, the selected novels are described and located within the corpus of the works by the authors so as to better bring out the relevance of the study of Toni Morrison and Bessie Head.

Then, the second chapter deals with a general review of literature. The different presentations of women's victimization will be taken into account before setting up the historical and social background of Toni Morrison's and Bessie Head's writings. In addition, the theme of womanhood in the two novels is dealt with in a critical perspective before at last summarizing the review of literature.

The third chapter adopts a theoretical orientation. First of all, an exploration of feminist literary theories is necessary. The choice of a theoretical framework would also be justified in this part. Our aim is to identify a specific theory which can be aligned with or applied to the novelists' ideas.

The fourth chapter analyses the issue of victimhood in the two novels. Indeed, the different forms of female subjection described in the materials as well as their consequences will be listed and analysed. This part represents the interpretative level of the study.

The fifth chapter presents the general conclusion. It comprises the summaries of the different major points and brings the perspectives into relief.

CHAPTER ONE

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

1. 0- INTRODUCTION

Many a novelist have been interested in the issue of female victimhood. Male as well as female authors have drawn inspiration from it. Women in the greatest part of their writings deal with victimhood or at least make some allusions to it. In most of such cases, historical and social circumstances explain the choice of the work's topic especially in *Beloved* and *A Question Of Power*.

Besides, the subject of womanhood in the two novels has raised many critical perspectives. Then victimhood, womanhood, added up to motherhood seem to be the most frequent issues dealt with in women's literature. They constitute the main set around which other minor issues turn around in this literature review.

1. 1 – WOMEN'S WRITING AND THE CONCERN WITH THE VICTIMIZATION OF WOMEN

Many female writers have been concerned with the victimization of women in many spheres of life, a victimization which not only tells on women psychologically, but also seems to be supported by some masculine theorizations on women's sexuality and psychology.

In fact, Sigmund Freud's arguments on female sexuality and above all the theory of castration have been interrogated by many feminists and even just female critics. According to Freud, the little boy feels guilty to think about incestuous relations with his mother. When he discovers that not all human beings have a penis, he fears castration as the punishment for his secret forbidden desires for the maternal body. Then he begins to identify his father no more as a rival but as the supreme moral authority to copy later. But the girl's feelings are less simplistic. Like the little boy, her love is first oriented towards her mother. But when she realizes that she is different from boys because she has no penis, she rejects her. She resents her mother because, for her, she is responsible for her castration. But, when she realizes that the mother also lacks a penis, she directs her love to the father and begins longing for a child by her father to replace the phallic organ.

For most feminist critics, Freud puts too much emphasis on the concept of "penis envy" which places women on an inferior status. In fact, Freud considers the woman as an imperfect, castrated man.

As for the Neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, his theory is based on language. For him, the child before acquiring speech lives in the "Imaginary", the equivalent of Freud's pre-oedipal phase of Infancy. The child lives in its own world. The next stage is the "Mirror Phase" which begins around six months. The

emphasis is put on the self and the child sees its reflection in the mother's or even another infant's eyes. It is the entry in the language system which will re-establish order: for Lacan, language is the "Symbolic Order". It is based on lack or loss. The phallus represents the paternal law imposing the loss of the desired mother. Before the acquisition of speech, the child lives in the unconscious and language brings it into being. As long as the child forms a unity with its mother, it has no need to express its desires but when the fear of castration separates them, it enters the language system. For Lacan, the father is the bearer of that system and culture, and the girl's introduction into language is complex because she cannot identify herself directly with the positive pole of that order.

According to French feminist critic Luce Irigaray, the imperfection of the theories put forward by such scholars as Freud and Lacan, is the definition of woman through man. They do not consider the woman as a specific and free being from man, and all her feelings and acts are interpreted in relation to man's own (Morris Pam, 115).

Thus other female critics such as Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Simone De Beauvoir have seen literature as a means to re-write female history. Cixous for instance advocates a female aesthetics or "l'écriture féminine". Elaine Showalter analyses it as a practice of writing "in the feminine which undermines the language, syntactical and metaphysical conventions of western narratives" (*The New Feminist Criticism*, 9).

Cixous and Kristeva go even further saying that, woman's body experiences a "jouissance" (pleasure, orgasm) while writing. The act of writing in itself embodies sexual waves transmitted by the text to the female body. Actually, they have contradicted the nineteenth century poet Gerard Manley Hopkins who stated in a letter to a friend that the artist's "most essential quality is masterly execution which is a kind of male gift, and especially marks off men from women..." (S. Gilbert & S. Gubar, 3). To correct such a statement, female

writers have seen it as a duty to shed a new light on female victimhood through their own writing.

In Africa, female writers's major concern was to question male idealization and romanticization of womanhood. In fact, if not totally left out in early works, women characters played then minor roles in literature. But the rise of the first African female writers introduced in the literary framework women's own view on their roles and images in society.

One of the most recurrent forms of oppression described in female writing is marriage. The husband is usually chosen by the father who has the possibility to accept or reject the demands for his daughter depending on the suitor's family background and the amount of the dowry. This is best illustrated in Naife's exclamation to his daughter : "you don't have to like your husband. You don't even have to know him in advance. You just marry him" (Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*, 204).

In fact, in female writing, the major male characters consider woman as a brainless plaything. Hence, man's burden is to guide the woman in this world. She is a property sailing from one master to the other:

All her life a woman always belonged to some male. At birth you were owned by your people, and when you were sold you belonged to a new master, when you grew up your new master who had paid something for you would control you
(Emecheta, *The Slave Girl*, 137).

Actually, Ojebeta has referred to another plague of women's victimization, slavery. Many female writers among whom is Buchi Emecheta have portrayed in their work the sale of little girls. Sometimes it is dictated by misery but in the case of Ojebeta, she is sold by her greedy and lazy elder brother who wants a costume for coming age-group dancing. But the worst is that he is not condemned for his act because for Ogbanje Ojebeta's aunt: "no woman is ever free. To be owned by a man is a great honour" (*The Slave Girl*, 194). Okolie's only wrong

has been to keep the money for himself instead of giving it to his elder brother, the "owner" of Ojebeta. Throughout the novel, parallels such as the one contained in the following statement have compared marriage to slavery:

Slave obey your master. Wife, honour your husband, who is your father, your head, your heart, your soul. So there was little room for Ojebeta to exercise her own individuality, her own feelings, for these were entwined in Jacob's (***The Slave Girl***, 215).

So, marriage means the loss of one's self-identity according to the narrator. The woman is no more in charge of her destiny, she cannot think for and by herself because the head of the family is responsible for all. He has to protect her and in return, she has to think and feel through her husband.

In addition, motherhood represents another way of victimizing women portrayed in female literature. In Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, the eponymous character lives a pitiful fate: she is barren. The community considers her a "male" woman and states that "we cannot eat beauty or happy marriage" and that "marriage must be fruitful" (137). She is looked down even if "her hands makes money. Anything she touches is money. If she begins to sell pepper in the market, she will make money out of it. If in salt, money will flow in" (125).

Thus, *Efuru* is beautiful, well-educated, generous, respectful and rich but a "child is more valuable than money" (37). A woman's respectability lies on her productivity: the more children she can provide, the more she is respected and valued. Nonetheless, to bear children is not enough, male ones are more preferred. In fact, females are said to grow and go to help building another man's household whereas males stay, marry and perpetuate their father's name. Then the husband's preference for male children leads the woman to undervalue her female offspring. It has led Adaku, a character in *The Joys Of Motherhood* to shout out at her co-wife's son: "you are worth more than ten Dumbis [her female child]" (128).

Furthermore, sexist discrimination is extended to school attendance. Indeed, girls are described in female literature as meaningless victims who help in the housework when boys are sent to school. The main reason is voiced by a male character, though educated in *Efuru*: "[It] is a waste sending [girls] to school ... they get married before the end of their training and the money is wasted" (191-192).

Moreover, they are portrayed as mere commodities to be sold to help in providing funds for male education: "these girls when they grow up will be great helpers to you in looking after the boys. Their bride price will be used in paying their school fees as well (*The Joys of Motherhood*, 137).

As far as men prefer male children, women, to win their husband's preference in polygamist families compete for more sons. Polygamy is described by female authors as a major point in women's victimhood. But it has raised controversial views because on the one hand it permits women to have more time to devote to their petty commerce and to rest while the co-wife receives the husband. But on the other hand, it is not always as simple as that. For instance, in Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter*, Maodo has left his wife Ramatoulaye, with a dozen of children, for their daughter's classmate, after thirty years of marriage. She has to face alone all the family's charges and problems: juvenile delinquency, precocious pregnancy, etc. She chooses to resign and wait for her inconstant husband as if to reaffirm the narrator's statement in *The Slave Girl*: "but only a stupid woman would expect her husband to remain married to her alone. What was [Ojebeta], if not only a woman?" (214).

Thus the woman has so little importance that she is considered not only "stupid" but egocentric as well if she wants to keep the one she loves for herself. According to the sociologist Fatoumata Sow, women compete in polygamous families even in the reproductive field:

l'on fait des enfants jusqu'à y laisser sa santé, sa vie. Dans les ménages polygames, on parle de la "course aux enfants" en vue de l'héritage (3).

(One has so many children even if one's life is at risk. In polygamous families, observers often talk about a "competition for more children" with inheritance in mind).

But woman's inferiority and subjection is so much deep-rooted in the collective mind according to female writers' works that she continues to be persecuted even after the death of her husband. In *The Bride Price*, the narrator comments the widow's victimhood: "so testing was this period [nine months] for a widow that before it was over, she herself die and this would be treated as a clear indication that she had been responsible for her husband's death" (Emecheta, 72).

In fact, during this period, the woman must be isolated in a special hut. She may not either visit someone or be visited. The minor health rules such as having a bath, cutting or combing her hair are also forbidden to her. She has to wear the same old smoked rags during all the period of her widowhood. It is as if the narrator merely wants to suggest that the woman is unworthy living while her husband is dead because it has stated earlier: "whatever identity [women] had was forfeited the day money was paid for them" (*The Slave Girl*, 215).

Nevertheless, according to some critics, there existed a tiny balance which had been completely destroyed by colonialism. Hilda Bernstein, talking about the system in South Africa, argues, that African peoples discovered inferiority complex first during the colonial period but for her :

the women have the burden doubled: the black consciousness of "inferiority" ingrained by the colonists, the destruction of tribal structures that gave status to both sexes and the denigration of any culture other than that of the colonists themselves is the first imposition; the second is the inferior status imposed by the relationship of the men and women (Kolawole, 29).

Thus the black woman in South Africa is doubly victimized is by racist oppression and sexist segregation. In fact, the European white settlers came from highly sexist communities where women had hardly any right: they could not vote, they were denied the right to property, and were confined in the houses as

far as their female status prevented them from working outside.

Bernstein shares her view with the Population Council's experts who affirm in their project for the *Ministère de la Femme de l'Enfant et de la Famille* (Woman, Infant and Family Ministry) that the white males' social prejudices in addition to foreign religions' restrictions have caused the destruction of the more or less balanced relations between male and female Africans.

But in South Africa, the half-cast minority was the most victimized. Indeed, the law clearly stipulated absolute prohibition of sexual intercourse between Blacks and Whites. Thus the hybrids, resulting from such relations had to bear the consequences all their life. They were and still are rejected by either community; for black people, hybrids are too light-skinned to belong to their community and for Whites, the hybrids' traits and dark complexion situate them within the black race . And both communities resent them for sullyng their blood. According to a character in *My Son's Story*, it is "halfway between . . . being not defined " (Nadine Gordimer, 20 -21).

Nonetheless, it is more difficult for women who, apart from being racial outcasts, are gender oppressed. And their status may be compared to black women's victimhood in the United States of America. In *Womanism and African Consciousness*, Kolawole cites Dorothy Sterling who states: "to be a black woman in nineteenth century America was to live in the double jeopardy of belonging to the " inferior " sex of an " inferior " race (32).

Black women, already overwhelmed by racist imperialism in America, are submitted to an institutionalized sexist system. The black female slave is not victimized just because she is black but also because she is a woman then, inferior to man. Her major value is her reproductive function. She is regarded as the breeder of the black slave race and is often raped by the white master, like Nanny who just one week after the birth of her baby girl is threatened by the mistress :

*Nigger, whut's yo'baby doin' wid gray eyes and yaller hair? . . .
Ah'll have you whipped till de blood run down to yo'heels! . . .
Anyhow, as soon as dat brat is a month old Ah'm going to sell it
offa dis place (Hurston, 33-34).*

Black women's double victimhood is caused on the one hand by such treatments but on the other, they have also to cope with the black man's violence. Albert teaches his son Harpo in *The Color Purple* how to handle his strong-minded wife Sofia:

Well how you spect to make her mind? Wives is like children. You have to let'em know who got the upper hand. Nothing can do that better than a good sound beating.... Sofia think too much of herself anyway,... she need to be taken down a peg (Alice Walker, 42).

In fact, the black man's bitterness and frustration are reflected back in Albert's words. The white man treats him as a mere nothing. Throughout the novel, he is called Mr _____ as if he were a nullity. Thus to show his manhood, he uses violence upon those under his direct authority. The black man is denied access to instruction and is confined by the society in hard manual labor. So to rehabilitate himself, he needs to make children and wife bow under his yoke. And if the man does not have a wife or children, he will oppress his other female relatives and this may be illustrated by Sofia's confession to Celie: "all my life I had to fight. I had to fight my daddy. I had to fight my brothers. I had to fight my cousins and uncles. A girl child ain't safe in a family of men" (46).

Patriarchal societies have always assigned minor roles to women so that their intellect has not often been put to test and it has led the first male theorists to describe them as invisible, self-effaced and simply males' shadows. Plato, Freud, Lacan among others have set up woman as an imperfect castrated man, giving to female writers later, the first motive of their claims.

Via literature, writers have denounced women's victimhood in patriarchal systems. In Africa for instance, women's freedom of choice in marriage and motherhood has been the most claimed rights. In South Africa and America, alongside the gender subjection, women have experienced racist discrimination which have led female writers to relate their stories.

1. 2 – HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE WRITINGS OF TONI MORRISON AND BESSIE HEAD

Bessie Amelia Emery was born in 1937 in Pietermaritzburg from an unknown black father and a white mother in an asylum, for her mother was diagnosed insane. No one has ever had any information on her father. But she grew with the sense that she resulted from a crime because to keep the white race pure, cross-breeding was highly repressed. Then when her mother's family realized that she was a half-breed, she was given to an adoptive white family which would find out her difference and give her back. A coloured couple, the Heathcotes, would finally adopt her by means of an amount of money to sustain her education. They instructed her until the age of thirteen, when she needed to further her studies. She entered St. Monica's Home on January 23, 1950. It was an Anglican Mission school for coloured girls. And it was not rare to see black women abused by white men bring their daughter in this institution. In 1975, when the Head Office did not allow her to spend her holidays with Nellie Heathcote, she was so depressed that they abruptly revealed to her her true origins: "your mother was insane. If you're not careful you'll get insane just like your mother.... They had to lock her up as she was having a child by the stable boy who was a native" (MacKenzie, 4).

In addition, she learnt that her mother had stated before her death that "above all things, it was her earnest desire that her daughter receive an education and some of her money should be set aside" (Eilersen, 25). Besides, she insisted that her daughter bear her name: Bessie Amelia Emery. From that day, Bessie Head would begin sensing her mother's distress and by the same feel some tenderness toward that woman who till her last moments had thought about her. At the end of her studies, she left St-Monica's and was appointed to the teaching staff of Clairewood Coloured School. She had already deeply felt the exclusion of

hybrids but when she entered active life, she found it outrageous.

Many times harassed not only because of her womanhood but also her colour, she began taking an interest in politics; she was more attracted by Panafricanist ideas and admired writers such as George Padmore for such convictions. She was so much attracted by Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy that she joined Hinduism. Indeed, *A Question Of Power* is full of references to the buddhist philosophy and, she is even convinced to have been in a previous life Ramah Krishna, a religious character in the sect. Her boiling energy no more fitted her peaceful teaching work so she left it to go to Cape Town and then Johannesburg from 1958 to 1960. She became more and more involved in political life, after holding a column for teenagers for around a year.

Indeed in 1959, for the first time, one of Bessie Head's articles more or less conveyed a political message. Black people had previously demonstrated in the streets and the police had fired at them, killing many of them. In her following article, she dealt with teenagers' rebellion against parental authority. Maybe, she considered South Africa's system a tyrannical patriarch imposing upon his meaningless offspring his parental authority. Passing through a deep depression, she attempted suicide in April 1960. She no longer wanted to endure the life in a country torn by Apartheid. And in May 31, 1961, when South Africa was declared a free Republic, the Government established laws to legitimate its system. Bessie Head would soon get involved in a political circle of activists and writers to protest against the racist state. In 1963, she stated that:

Every and any man, woman who ever thinks in this country gravitates to some political party. Outside this you may have friends but none that you could carry on a reasonable or intelligent conversation with (Eilersen, 51).

In search of true friendship, the passionate nature of Bessie Amelia Emery had found it at last in her comrades in misery. She met a member of the Liberal Party named Harrold Head and married him at 24. But her strong and possessive

personality would not let the relation last long after the birth of their first male child. Besides, Bessie Head would lose almost all her friends in the early sixties because of the series of political arrests. The political crisis deepened and Bessie Head went through another nervous breakdown. She was once more alone and disgusted by the South African racist dictatorship, she decided to leave her country and settle in Bechuanaland (known as Botswana today) in 1964. It is the reason why exile has had so much important place in her writing.

In 1979, she acquired citizenship and for her, the South African chapter was definitely closed. But her first novel is reminiscent of it. She tells in *When Rain Clouds Gather* the story of a protagonist who has fled his country, South Africa, to seek refuge in another one. The adaptation is not always easy and he has sometimes to face some complexities.

In fact, Bessie Head has tried to take advantage of her own experience as a coloured, in a racist country ruled by white people, and in a black African community as an exile to write her first novel, *Maru* (1971) and later *A Question Of Power* (1974). In both novels, Bessie Head deals with black and coloured main female characters facing segregation and racism in conjunction with sexism. In *Maru*, Bessie Head denounces the cruelty of Africans to minor classes: women and enslaved ethnic groups. Margaret Cadmore is not only a woman but belongs to the masarwa. Her classmates derogate her in songs such as: "Bushman, Low Breed, Bastard" (11), and do not consider her a human being. For the children's episode, according to Eilersen, she was inspired by her son Howard's experience at school. In fact, all Head's writing for her is derived from her own life. For instance, *A Question Of Power* is full of parallels between Elizabeth's and Bessie Head's lives. Not only do they share the same name - because Bessie is a shortened form of Elizabeth - but also they are both mixed blood women. Further, both mothers had insisted during one of their few and far between moments of consciousness that some money should be set aside to educate their daughters.

Actually, both of them are insane persons and Elizabeth, deep inside herself, feels her mother's need to relieve herself of part of this heavy load: "Do you think I can bear the stigma of insanity alone? Share it with me" (*A Question Of Power*, 17).

Elizabeth is convinced that her mother had wanted her daughter to share and perhaps understand her former sufferings. In addition, Eilersen observes in *Thunder Behind Her Ears* that Elizabeth's mother as well as Head's own had spent their last moments in a mental asylum totally withdrawn from reality. And they both belong to the white middle-class.

Actually, the reader can hardly separate Bessie Head's life from Elizabeth's fictional story in *A Question Of Power*. It is merely the narratives of Head's inner turmoils for Eilersen. Indeed, she has greatly suffered from her social exclusion because of her being a mixed breed. And she observes that as far as Bessie Head's three novels are a trilogy, the quest of integration and esteem of the protagonist in *When Rain Clouds Gather* will fail in *A Question Of Power* because of Elizabeth's hybridity; and her being a female hybrid does not arrange things. And Bessie Head herself had lived similar situation. She lost many a job because of sexual harassment.

Her conflictual relations with men established a convincing lead over her love life. Like Elizabeth, Bessie Head felt better with men in intellectual discussions than in physical relations. She carried friendly relations with many men but she missed her private life. She suffered nervous breakdowns many a time as a result of her experiences in marriage, social life and also possible hereditary madness. Thus, Head was in a position to write about racism: "With all my South African experience, I longed to write an enduring novel on the hideousness of racial prejudices" (MacKenzie, 68).

Similarly, Toni Morrison's characters have suffered from racism and sexism. Chloe Anthony Wofford, in her true name, Morrison, was born on

February 18, 1931 in Lorrain (Ohio) from George and Ramah Willis. She grew up in a family of storytellers and musicians. After a brief career as a teacher at Howard University and Texas Southern University, she became an editor. From her marriage with the Jamaican architect Harrold Morrison, she has had two sons.

The major themes in Toni Morrison's writing are love, sex, and race. She highlights the relationships between Blacks and Whites, Blacks and Blacks, women and men in a white male-dominated racist society. In *The Bluest Eye* for instance, a young female child, Claudia, narrates the complex and horrific story of another female child Pecola Breedlove. After being raped by her father, Pecola seeks solace in madness. Claudia, analysing her friend's tragic fate, accuses the whole community, including herself. Indeed, her mother Pauline Breedlove embittered by her husband's violence and misery reduces her life to her employer's satisfaction. More and more she:

Neglected her house, her children, her man. They were like the afterthoughts one has just before sleep, the early-morning and late evening edges of her day, the dark edges that made the daily life with the Fisher lighter, more delicate, more lovely (101).

In fact, Pauline, like her daughter and most black people, has ended by considering white the standard of beauty. While she can call her employer's daughter by sweet names, she cannot support her own daughter's sight. Through her, Morrison has illustrated the daily life of black women and men in a white racist and sexist American society. She once heard about a little black girl praying for blue eyes and she first wrote a very short story about it, then she developed what would be the first novel of a long and rich list of works.

All her writing is derived from African American men's and women's lives in America. *Beloved* (1988), her Nobel Prize winning novel, is set in the post Civil War period in rural Ohio. It is grounded on historical record. In fact, it is an historical fact that black women preferred to terminate their offsprings' lives sometimes rather than let them live the atrocities of slavery. A woman, Margaret

Garner acted as such in 1851, inspiring, later on, the American female novelist Toni Morrison. She has revealed it in an interview:

The Abolitionists made a great deal out of her case because she had escaped from Kentucky with her four children. . . . She had been caught as a fugitive. And she made up her mind that they would not suffer the way she had and it was better for them to die (Taylor – Guthrie, 207-208).

Thus, she has seen it as a special task to re-write this story to exhume the black woman's story from where it has been buried in the national American consciousness. She declares:

This had got to be the least read of all the books I'd written because it is about something that the characters don't want to remember, I don't want to remember, black people don't want to remember, white people don't want to remember. I mean, it's national amnesia (Heinze, 180).

Hence, she has created "a story [not] to pass on" (*Beloved*, 275). If Head's *A Question Of Power* has been full of autobiographical insights, Morrison's *Beloved* has hardly any but it does not undermine its authenticity. Both novelists have grounded their works on daily life in their respective countries to describe and denounce women's victimhood. Consequently, their works have aroused a lot of critical responses.

1.3 – CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE SUBJECT OF WOMANHOOD IN MORRISON'S *BELOVED* AND HEAD'S *A QUESTION OF POWER*

Toni Morrison could not have chosen a better historical issue than slavery to analyze women's victimhood. Slavery is defined in *The Mad Woman In The Attic* as: "a patriarchal institution in which both slaves and wives - and especially slaves who function as wives and wives who function like slaves - are used and abused" (S. Gubar and S. Gilbert, 482).

The comparison between wives and slaves is significant enough to suggest both sexist and racist oppression. Sometimes women seek and find solace in motherhood but for the black slave it is instead a source of other greater sorrows. In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison problematizes African American motherhood. Carole Boyce Davies has qualified the issue as a "beautiful ugliness" (*Black Women Writing*, 135). The use of oxymoron is to put the stress on the fact that to give birth is praiseworthy but it is just to bring an innocent being in a tyrannous world. It is beautiful in itself but slave owners do not let the beauty last long. And Toni Morrison has been particularly good at presenting feminine psyche in such a case. Sethe has all the qualities which characterize womanhood for Davies:

One has to read Sethe, as a particular Black woman, as the concentration of female identity, not as its aberration.... And significantly, while she can flee slavery, she cannot flee motherhood or the body that has been captured by the needs of her children (*Black Women Writing*, 138-139).

She has developed an instinct for survival which has led her to "put [her] babies where they'd be safe" (*Beloved*, 164). She feels bound to her children and would not willingly let them go with Schoolteacher. But there lies the problem of Sethe, which "is rooted in her inability to recognize the boundaries between herself and her children" (Bauer, "*Beloved*-The paradox", 2). Bauer's essay attempts to settle the issue of whether Sethe's deed is out of true love or selfish pride. But his

position is nearer to the second point. He admits that Sethe loves her children more than herself but, her act cannot be qualified noble because it is a mere "selfish refusal to reenter a life of slavery" (1).

Furthermore, Sethe may have thought about her children at first but unconsciously her revolt which results in her killing her baby is for her own survival: "the truth that Sethe's character selfishly avoids is the actual physical death that she has inflicted upon her child" (3). Bauer further affirms that the one to be condemned first for the baby's murder is Sethe. She refuses to "recognize that absurdity of the murderous act" but:

[her] love for her children does not preclude her responsibility for Beloved's death. Indeed Sethe's selfish fault lies in the fact that she has shifted the locus of responsibility from herself to the institution.... Ultimately [she] is responsible for her child's death not slavery (3).

But it still remains true that Sethe has turned into a violent and desperate meaningless victim because of slavery and its supporters. It has deprived her of a family life when she was young. Then a full grown woman, she wants to give her children what she missed so much in her past. Precisely, this is the novel's primary theme for some critics: "the relationship between past, present and future; the passage of time and its subsequent effects on humanity" (Weisenberger, "**Beloved**-An Explication", 5). To better illustrate it, Weisenberger has fitted Hegel's dialectic philosophy to the novel. Indeed, for Hegel the set of thesis, antithesis and synthesis may be applied to any case. And Kirsten Weisenberger has found that in **Beloved** :

*The thesis, Sethe's devotion to her children, addresses the theme of motherhood and its implications as further developed throughout the story. The antithesis, Sethe's devotion to herself, addresses the theme of pride, self-love and self-esteem.... The synthesis, harmony and balance between these elements, focuses the ideas as well as presenting an ominous happy medium (Weisenberger, "**Beloved**-An Explication" 5-6).*

Moreover, in "*Beloved*-A Tree On Her Back", it is said that the connection between Beloved and Sethe's unnamed child cannot be denied. And the latter's guilt prevent her from loving or being loved. The only use in the story is Denver's regaining consciousness:

The archetype of Sethe's destruction at the hands of her own identity proves a valuable lesson for Denver. She realizes that she shouldn't allow herself to be a victim of conscience, so must help her mother help herself

(Weisenberger, "*Beloved*- A Tree on her Back" 7).

Thus with the help of actual elements of her future, Denver and Paul D, Sethe at last "defeats her subserviency to her past" (*Beloved*, 8).

But such acquiescence in her own destruction may imply that the central theme is guilt or else love but only if we, readers "understand and even approve of the dynamic that allowed a slave mother to kill rather than have her children remanded to slavery" (Trudier, 160).

Anyway, he states that Sethe's act has precedence because her own mother killed some of her children to revolt against the humiliation of being sexually used by the crew members during the Middle Passage. He further affirms that Beloved's characterization makes her "Thing", she is "unhuman, unfeeling, uncaring except in the perpetuation of what she wants" (Trudier, 160).

But she is exorcised by a group of women who call upon ancient and contemporary, pagan and religious rituals. Thus she retreats before "the immutable force of potential mother / goddesses". For the critic, women in *Beloved* have fought against the "Other" so that all of them will not be judged demons. Does it imply that: "Morrison [is] suggesting finally that women, who may themselves be demonic – or because they are demonic – are the only force with sufficient power to control that evil?" (Trudier, 161).

For Trudier, Beloved has finally achieved two things: first seriously reducing Sethe to irrationality, second the result is that she bursts to save her: she no more attacks her child, but directs her murderous temper to the white man, and

what *Beloved* could not see in her early infancy eighteen years ago, she may see it then and know that her mother's action was out of love. But for the critic, it does not mean that "the demon changes her nature, but that she achieves her desire: tangible evidence that her mother loved her best of all" and Trudier remarks the irony in the fact that such achievement of evidence is to "risk eventual destruction of the individual of whom the evidence was required" (Trudier, 163).

Sethe in killing her baby first and then retiring from the community's life, opposes the traditional stereotyped black matriarch. She claims a powerful self-determination and "in her willful commission of violence, she explodes the myth of the acquiescent, long-suffering black matriarch who trusts her fate and that of those she loves to a benign if not distant God" (Trudier, 189).

But in spite of her strong will and the help of the community of women, it is Paul D who gives her back a sense of herself, not Baby Suggs's last recommendations, Denver, or even the joy of having seen and lived with her "dearly beloved" child. He steadily affirms to her that she, Sethe, is her "best thing", not *Beloved* (273).

And according to Trudier: "on the landscape of Morrison's fictive imagination, women stand only with the assistance of men, but men grow over the deranged or dead bodies of women" (190). As for Bernard W. Bell, he defines *Beloved* as a :

Ghost story that frames embedded narratives of the impact of slavery, racism, and sexism on the capacity for love, faith, and community of black families, especially of black women, during the Reconstruction Period (8-9).

In addition, he has found the theme of African American womanhood primordial in the novel. Woman's high sensitivity is often opposed to man's misunderstanding. When Paul D qualifies Sethe's love "to thick", she answers "love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all" (164). And because of her deed, he

compares her to an animal: "you got two feet, Sethe, not four" (165).

But such love may be explained by the importance of the maternal bonds in the plot :

Foregrounding the theme of motherhood, Morrison divides the text into twenty eight unnumbered mini sections, the usual number of days in a woman's monthly menstrual cycle, within three larger, disproportionate sections (Bell, 10).



Within these sections, Sethe has lived the happiest twenty-eight days of her life. She has lived during these days all that she has ever lacked in her whole life: "having women friends, a mother-in-law, all her children together; and being part of a neighborhood" (*Beloved*, 173).

In the same way, another critic has found "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, the first book-length work to examine the dangers of mothering to the individuation of the mother herself" (Demetrekopoulos, 52). She has found Morrison's interest on women's motherhood unprecedented in the literary sphere. Indeed, in fiction, women's maternal feelings and reactions have always been analysed in relationship with something or someone. But for Demetrekopoulos, Morrison has just put the emphasis on the matriarch who is central in the plot. But she, herself, thinks about her children first of all. Even her escape from slavery was not for herself but for her children and the critic observes that the sex of the first child to be killed is not casual. Indeed :

For Sethe. . .to kill her daughter is to kill her own best self, to kill her best and self-gendered fantasy of the future. The act is like killing time itself, especially its redemptive gifts, which the daughter, as a potential mother, symbolizes (53).

She agrees with Trudier in the sense that Sethe is healed by the force composed by the community of mothers and she states : "perhaps only through other women, preferably mothers themselves, can we women traverse the stages of mothering" (57). And she considers them Morrison's embodiment of the "tribal metaphor that confronts and defies the way that American culture so denigrates, so desacralizes motherhood" (58). Demetrekopoulos has found that in

putting forward the community of mothers, the writer wants to demonstrate the importance of mothering. Motherhood has been so much reduced into commonplace that for her, Morrison has felt the need to embellish it once more. And ultimately, she has found that: "this rich novel examines the death of the maternal in a woman so that her self might live" (58).

As for Bessie Head's *A Question of Power*, critics have expressed different views from many perspectives. According to Kolawole, her novel lacks particularly African qualities. In fact, the theme of madness is "foreign" to African fiction. The main reason, she argues, is that Bessie Head has never adapted herself to the African culture. And her failure to integrate has been dealt with in many critical works on her. For another critic it is: "all those flailing tribal penises and radiating vaginas in her work - going too far, still taboo" (Stephen Gray, 1).

He argues that Bessie Head's airing sex in her work is unusual in African female fiction. But it has increased the value of her work because she has masterfully joined the western plain speaking to acuteness of feelings proper to African people. Like Sethe, Elizabeth suffers torments. But her tormentors haunt her sleep and end by invading her whole life: "Elizabeth is a victim of spiritual oppression for reasons which she does not understand and which she cannot resist. As she is drawn deeper into the web of evil she finds that her resources do not suffice" (Eilersen, 145).

In fact, Elizabeth does not understand her fate. And for Kolawole, Bessie Head turns uses Elizabeth's character as a basis for castigating racial, class, ethnic and cultural discrimination but she deplores that: "the space occupied by African women in contemporary discourse on women is still a domain that has not been adequately explored despite an increasing interest from the continent and from outside" (3).

Besides, Jacques Chevrier, in *Revue Notre Librairie: Littérature d'Afrique du Sud*, notices :

Sans nécessairement se réclamer du féminisme que marque fortement son empreinte nord-américaine...Bessie Head...stigmatise des comportements, des habitudes et des attitudes engendrées par une société traditionnelle encore largement mysogyne (105).

(Bessie Head stigmatizes behaviours, habits and attitudes produced by a traditional society yet widely misogynist. But she does not clearly claim sympathy to that form of feminism which is highly influenced by the North American trend).

Moreover, Bessie Head's writings cover many aspects of her personal experience as a racially mixed person in South Africa: discrimination, exile, sexism, African future, poverty and interpersonal relationships. And Kate Bissel adds: "a hint of autobiography is present in much of Head's writing, which often deals with poor and emotionally abused black women dealing with both racist and sexist discrimination" (1).

In addition, the page on Head from the University of Florida's web site has found similarities between Bessie Head's and Elizabeth's lives. Elizabeth's relationships with Sello and Dan take place entirely on her mind. But when the first is just said to be "bizarre", the second is merely qualified "hellish" because he forces her to watch the sexual acts he performs on a series of fantastic women and tortures her with visions. For Eilersen, Elizabeth's oppression is mainly because she is a female mixed-breed. She is constantly reminded that she does not belong to the land. And for Eilersen, Elizabeth feels a sense of sexual and racial inferiority because Dan lets her always know that she is not part of their show because she is not an African, and she cannot react the way an African woman would to sexual skilfulness. Then she ends internalizing such prejudices. In fact, Dan may be the perfect illustration of phallogentric males. Each night, he parades many women to let her know that he may satisfy anyone but her. And: "compared to the eccentric Sello and the glamorous Dan, Elizabeth is self-effacing, subdued, a victim. Socially, she is oppressed because she is a woman,

and politically, because she is coloured" (145). She endures their scorn and is unable to withstand such pressure; she will soon break down mentally. She becomes schizophrenic and loses touch with the reality.

According to Gray, the character is as complex as the author. For him: "being mixed-race and sexually ambivalent, not to mention on and off sane, Head was nothing if not hybridised. But she also liked to subvert all such discourses by speaking plain English" (2).

The issue of woman's victimhood is of topical interest today, thus it explains the enthusiastic criticisms attracted by Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Bessie Head's *A Question Of Power* and, its being a major point in literary analysis.

1. 4 - THE SUMMARY OF THE REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The literature review has permitted us to list a number of issues related to woman's victimhood dealt with in literature. For many critics, women writers have been inspired by their own real life in creating their characters :

It is through the violence of the double that the female author enacts her own raging desire to escape male houses and male text...Defining themselves as prisoners of their own gender, for instance, women frequently create characters who attempt to escape (Gilbert and Gubar, 85-86).

It seems that to create a female character and bring her on the scene is essential to fight against oppression and help other women by the same to be aware of female victimhood. One of the most recurrent problems faced by women is motherhood :

In many African societies motherhood defines womanhood. At some points, almost every novel dramatizes a woman's struggle to conceive: her fear of being replaced, the consequent happiness at conception and delivery or agony at the denial of motherhood (Ngambika, 243).

Of course it is not just restricted to African realities because motherhood is also central in Morrison's *Beloved*. In retelling the story of the black female slave, she has made attempt at making infanticide during slavery if not forgivable, at least understandable. In fact, the importance of motherhood in *Beloved* justifies for Bell the division of the text and Sethe's experiencing for the first and last time plain and entire happiness during twenty-eight days. In addition, Elizabeth has been helped in *A Question Of Power* by her son in her recovering. Thus critics have shown that while some women have sought and found sometimes self identity in motherhood, others have not found : "fulfilment in either of the conventional ideals of African womanhood: neither in the much vaunted glory of motherhood, nor in the silently-assenting-to-[their]-subservience contentement of

wifehood" (Florence Stratton, 86).

In addition, women's double jeopardy is another issue reviewed in literature. Indeed, black women in America have shared with their sisters in South Africa subjection in white male-dominated societies. They have been confronted on the one hand to white domination and on the other to black male oppressive ways :

Throughout the history of the United States, the interrelationship of white supremacy and male superiority has characterized the Black woman's reality as a situation of struggle – a struggle to survive in two contradictory worlds simultaneously, one white, privileged, and oppressive, the other black, exploited, and oppressed (Collins, 22).

Then, for black women writers, because of that devalued place in society, the woman has always been excluded or misrepresented in the literary canon. Among others, one of them has noticed:

It is always something of a shock to see black women, sharing equally (and sometimes more than equally) in the labor and strife of black people, expunged from the text when that history becomes shaped into what we call tradition (Washington, 32).

She continues asking why the "fugitive slave, the fiery orator, the political activist" is always represented as a black male? Hence to fight against such segregation, women have worked out theories to sustain their claims for equality with men in society.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

2.0 - INTRODUCTION

As a matter of fact, woman's political, social, cultural and economic victimhood have inspired many theoreticians. They have tried to liberate her not only from the framework of knowledge and history but also in the social and cultural fields. Consequently, the rejection of roles such as wives, mothers, and homekeepers has been progressive.

Nevertheless, the first theories reflected the aspirations and claims of definite social groups. Hence, other scholars have either invented totally new theories or else adjusted the previous ones to their realities. Definitely, it has not been without serious conflicts sometimes.

The theoretical orientation we have chosen for this study is womanism because its principles agree with the gender situations in *Beloved* and *A Question Of Power*.

2.1- FEMINIST LITERARY THEORIES

Actually, "feminism" came into English from the French "féminisme" which was first used in the 1880s by an advocate of women's political rights Hubertine Auclert. She was the founder of the first Woman Suffrage society in France. Among the various definitions, one embodies more or less the whole sense of this ideology:

[Feminism is] a complete social revolution: freedom for all forms of women's active expression, elimination of all structural and psychological handicaps to women's economic independence, an end to the double standard of sexual morality, release from constraining sexual stereotypes and opportunity to shine in every civic professional capacity (Nancy F. Cott, 15).

Though political turning-points occurred in the twentieth century, the ideology originated from earlier periods. It took its principles from various sources. The latter part of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth witnessed progress in all fields but particularly in literature and is known as the Enlightenment. A literary movement especially, developed during this period, Rationalism, would nourish the feminist theories later with ideas about natural equal rights and liberties for all human beings.

In addition, feminist theorists were encouraged by Protestantism which, in the religious field, in the nineteenth century, claimed the moral superiority of women. On the basis of such an assertion, they thus valued womanhood. Finally political ideologues, grounding their critiques of inequity in the capitalist societies on socialist ideology, provided feminists with another argument. Indeed they reproached the capitalist system with its competitive and individualist principles, which were for women basically oppressive.

In fact, Mary Wollstonecraft and later on Simone De Beauvoir among the most famous, defended women's rights in claiming that sex hierarchy was social but not natural, and aimed at raising feminist consciousness. Consequently, such

assertions resulted in the rise of different feminist literary theories. The French feminists for instance have looked at the "ways that the 'feminine' has been defined, represented, or repressed in the symbolic system of language, metaphysics, psychoanalysis, and art" (Elaine Showalter, 9).

Indeed, feminists have first concentrated on denouncing misogyny in classic and popular male literature: stereotyped images of women (either good or evil) in texts. Then, they have uncovered a female aesthetics in the literary field which has totally been left out by patriarchal norms. Finally, women have not only required the recognition of their writing but also a "radical rethinking of the conceptual grounds of literary study, a revision of the accepted theoretical assumptions about reading and writing...based on male literary experience" (Showalter, 8).

Radical French feminist theorists have urged female writers to identify with whatever is devalued in society by cultural norms. Cixous for instance considers woman's writing as a revolutionary force: "when the repressed of their culture and their society return, it is an explosive, utterly destructive, staggering return, with a force never yet unleashed" (Cixous, 256).

Cixous, along with Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Monique Wittig agree on fighting against Western culture's phallogentric oppression. They have also fiercely resisted man's self-identification as the positive pole and the rest of the world in opposition with him as the "Other". And they have concluded that language in general has been used by man as a means to objectify those under his direct authority, especially women. They have declared "jouissance", the pleasure provided to women by writing and which may be sexual, as a form of resistance to the Law of the Father.

Kristeva and Cixous have gone further to state that a thorough historical study reveals that women have only played the role of sexual objects for men whereas their sexual self-expression has been annihilated. But apart from their

common agreement on the adversary, the French theorists have elaborated different strategies.

For Julia Kristeva, women should not invent a totally new discourse to liberate themselves. Instead they have to challenge those which already exist and have devalued them. Kristeva affirms that womanhood is not biological but an attitude one takes to resist conventions and it may be experienced by some men:

A feminist practice can only be...at odds with what already exists so that we may say 'that's not it' and 'that's still not it'. By 'woman' I mean that which cannot be represented, what is not said, what remains above and beyond nomenclatures and ideologies. There are certain 'men' who are familiar with this phenomenon (Elaine Showalter, 363).

Indeed, she has considered the classical French male writers: Joyce, Bataille, Artaud, Mallarmé and Lauréamont as writing "in the feminine". For Kristeva, "l'écriture féminine is not necessarily writing by women, it is an avant-garde writing style..." (Elaine Showalter, 9). From her interpretation of the male classic writers' texts, she has concluded that they have not escaped their oedipal fantasies and still continue their incestuous relations with their mothers subconsciously in their writings. Hence, in challenging the basic moral rules of the traditional system, they have achieved one of the foremost qualities of "l'écriture féminine".

Nevertheless, a typical female trait, motherhood, is in her work "a central concept, manifested in bonds that are stronger than gendered love and that determine identity formation especially in the female case, where motherhood is perceived cyclically" (Maria Alexandru, 356). With Cixous, they have been committed to "rethinking the maternal" on language and writing, trying to give to motherhood the importance it deserves in tradition.

Unlike Kristeva, Luce Irigaray acknowledges a specificity peculiar to women and which is not applicable to men. She derides Plato's and Freud's thesis on woman as a castrated, imperfect man and argues, that her ignorance is

greatly due to her evolution in a man-centered world. She advocates that women should first acquire self-consciousness about their body and sexual pleasure as far as these are misrepresented in the phallogocentric discourse. She observes that the whole body of a woman is made of erotic parts and "she" is completely other in herself. And for her it explains her highly versatile nature. In her language, "she" goes off in all directions and "he" is unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Contradictory words seem a little crazy to the logic of reason, and inaudible for him who listens with "ready-made grids" (Ann Rosalind Jones, 368). Nevertheless, she concedes that self-consciousness about sexuality cannot automatically settle phallogocentric oppression. But if women have to fight it, they have first to gain that.

The French radical theorist Monique Wittig in her own case, insists that "the theory and practice of 'fémininité' must be focused on women among themselves, rather than on their divergence from men or from men's views of them" (Jones, 362). She is among the theorists who believe that female victimization should be suppressed just in one way: creating a society entirely made of women. In fact, she advocates Lesbianism ; on the emphasis on women themselves in the study of their victimization, she is joined by another theorist who affirms that we must move outside the male-centered, binary logic :

We need to ask not how woman is different from man.... We need to know how women have come to be who they are through history, which is the history of their oppression by men and male-designed institutions (Jones, 369).

Unlike the French theorists, whose major concern has been to analyse the place of the "feminine" in language and traditional conventions, the English feminist theorists have mainly focused on the historical oppression of women as readers and writers. In addition, they have analysed the connections between gender and class. White middle-class women initiated a feminist movement which would spectacularly bloom in the twentieth century in the different fields :

political, literary etc. In the whole, feminism has been a "social awakening of the women of all the world" (Cott, 12). The social, cultural, economic, ideological and political differences of the various scholars give rise to some antagonisms.

2. 2- CONFLICTUAL STANDPOINTS IN FEMINIST LITERARY THEORIES

French feminist theories' concern for the study of language has its base in the influence of the "institutes and seminars of the Neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, the deconstructionist philosopher Jacques Derrida, and the structuralist critic Roland Barthes" (Showalter, 9). And it is precisely the main criticism raised against the French theorists, the emphasis they have put on language and the overly focus on the "féminine" while the Anglo-American trends have analysed the historical development of female victimization.

Nevertheless, major conflicts have existed between American and English feminist literary theories. Actually, the main difference has been the link with Socialist or Marxist Feminist literary theory for the second and the total antagonism with the first. Indeed, in the American tradition, women have been subordinated to men because of their economic dependence. Hence, Marxist literary theorists have maintained that "gender justice is not possible while class stratification is not eliminated. [They] blame therefore Capitalism for women's oppression" (Kolawole, 12).

Such definite condemnation explains the hostility of the great majority of American literary and political feminist theorists to Marxist feminist theory. Such an extremist reaction derives from the ideology of the American economic system: Liberalism. In fact, liberal theorists advocate the adjustment of legal and cultural structures for a gender justice.

But from the end of the nineteenth century, women activists are till now putting the emphasis on the interconnection between the economic and political subordination of women to men. Thus the first claims have been an economic independence embodied by their rights to labor and fair salary alongside the right

to vote. But while some theorists have advised them to join other movements like the one for freed slaves' rights, others have maintained that only entirely female made movement can put forward women's rights first. They argue that women's claims will be relegated in the secondary plan.

Another strategic turning-point which is controversial is also whether to fight against sex-based labor legislation. On the one hand, theorists find it restrictive and on the other, others securing, for it is considered protective legislation. Actually, the latter are conscious of the physiological differences between male and female workers and a critic observes:

Feminists have asserted that the essential difference between women and men does not lie in biology but rather in roles that patriarchal societies (men) have required each sex to play.... Biology is hence the source and not the enemy of feminist revolution (Jane Alpert, 15).

Really, some feminists do not want to lose the current advantages. The opponents to such compromise, provoke another split in advocating homophobia. They affirm Lesbianism should be the central point in female claims, hence, institutionalized heterosexuality is dismissed. It do not gain the approval of some male theorists who argue that only feminist theory can provide them the theoretical grounding for fighting gay oppression. But apart from gender, conflicts rise also around race and class issues.

2. 3- CHOICE OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND ITS JUSTIFICATION

Black feminist theory has its sources in two movements: the Black male and white female liberation thoughts. It really bloomed in the nineteen sixties. But it has faced black male sexist restrictions and white women's racist hegemony, hence black theorists have organized, to quote Virginia Woolf, "a room of their own". Black feminists analyse that:

Historically we have not been full participants in white feminist organizations. Even today African-American, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian-American women criticize the feminist movement and its scholarship for being racist and overly concerned with white, middle-class women's issues (Collins, 7).

Indeed, black feminists have found white feminist theories reflecting white hegemony. As far as white women belong to the privileged class, their claims cannot meet that of the lower class and, as Whites, they ignore race oppression. In fact, distinguishing features of black feminist theorists are shaped by:

Black women's experiences with both racial and gender oppression that result in needs and problems distinct from White women and Black men's, and Black women must struggle for equality both as women and as African-Americans (Collins, 20).

Furthermore, another trait of white theories which has been rejected by black women is its orientation to a white middle-class elite. While white women are bored with doing almost nothing, black women then, in their great majority, are working-class members. Indeed, the feminist theories in the United States have not emerged from those who suffer most from all forms of victimization: "the women who are most victimized by sexist oppression, women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically and spiritually" (Hooks, *Feminist Theory*, 1).

She continues arguing that white women want to be freed from their husbands, children, houses and have careers but the ones to take care of all that are black women.

Hence, resulting from such racist, social, economic and political exclusion, black intellectuals have elaborated theories totally fitted to their needs and claims. One of them, by the black writer Alice Walker embodies for many black scholars the essence of black womanhood. Womanism is, as she characterizes it, to feminism as "purple to lavender" (*In Search of Our Mother's Garden*, xii). By such comparison, she strengthens Rosemarie Tong's affirmation:

Feminist theory is not one, but many theories or perspectives and that each perspective attempts to describe women's oppression, to explain its causes and consequences and to prescribe strategies for women's liberation (Kolawole, 1).

Nevertheless, African-American females have formulated a theory suitable to their realities. And black female intellectuals have been central to black feminism because their experiences as Blacks and women have provided them an authentic standpoint on black womanhood, peculiar to them, and complex to understand for white female and black male scholars. For Alice Walker, "womanist" connotes a notion of colour and she is:

A woman who loves other women, sexually and or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health (In Search of Our Mother's Garden, xi).

Thus, a womanist may have platonic or sexual relations with other women but nevertheless, she is not fundamentally "separatist". Her interests concern the whole community, women as well as men are implied, but she is first and foremost a woman. Furthermore, other scholars go beyond assessing that black

feminism is not restrictive. It is not just to end male chauvinism or ensure equal rights for women:

*It is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates Western culture on various levels - sex, race, and class, to name a few - and a commitment to reorganizing U S society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion, and material desires (Hooks, *Ain't I a Woman?* , 194).*

Hooks evidences a marxist-feminist oriented view. She expresses aspirations beyond the binary pole male / female. For her, progress should profit to the Universe in a whole. She magnifies the individual and runs systematically down capitalism's competition. Actually, she is not the unique black feminist to believe that because The Combahee River Collective notices that: "We [black feminists] realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of all the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy" (16).

In fact, the rejection of the socio-economic and political system of the western world characterizes the self-consciousness of black females on sex, race and class oppression they have undergone during all these centuries. They have been the most oppressed in the economic field behind white women and black men. One core theme in black feminist theories consists of "analysing Black women's work, especially Black women's labor market victimization as 'mules'" (Collins, 43).

In 1987, the median Black family income (\$ 18, 1000) represented fifty six percent of the median white family income (\$ 32, 270). Two years earlier one of every three African Americans lived below the official poverty line, for one of every ten white Americans (Collins, 49).

Nevertheless, black men have not always received black feminist theories well. Their reactions have been sometimes notoriously negative. They even have felt more threatened by black women than the white system out of the fear that they organize themselves around their own needs :

They realize that they might not only lose valuable and hard working allies in their struggles but that they might also be forced to change their habitually sexist ways of interacting with and oppressing. Accusations that Black Feminism divides the Black struggle are powerful deterrents to the growth of an autonomous Black women's movement
(The Combahee River Collective, 19).

But despite black males' misunderstanding, black feminist theorists have, except a few, stood against Lesbianism. Of course fully aware of the triple race, sex and class jeopardy, black women have decided to separate those claims from those of the black male movement. But it has not prevented them from refusing separatism: "We reject the stance of lesbian separatism because it is not a viable political analysis or strategy for us. It leaves out far too many people, particularly Black men, women, and children" (The Combahee Collective, 17).

Really, womanism does not advocate acting, being like men but instead a full consciousness and affirmation of black femininity. In addition, womanists are conscious need men (as well as men need women) to fight against Western imperialism. And a strengthened and unified family is the first orientation of womanism, and that is particularly recurrent of some African qualities: "Womanism bears some resemblance to any theory about women but it has very distinct characteristics emerging from African values. African women in the diaspora are retrieving these values in spite of time and regional mediation" (Kolawole, 28).

Right in Africa itself, some black women have felt uncomfortable with the concept of Feminism even if they have not totally rejected the principle of women's liberation. They stand for pro-women literary theories but resist the label of feminism because of:

Its overclose association with the western women's movement. [While they] feel strengthened by the existence of women's movements in Western as in Eastern countries...However...feminism, as appropriated and defined by the West, has too often become a tool of cultural imperialism
(Kolawole, 16).

Nevertheless, black women have understood that white feminist literary theories owe their radicalism to the western context. But a meeting point is that African women like all women need liberation and to argue against that for Kolawole is an illusion resulting from over-romanticism. But many African women writers refuse the western ideological philosophy. Buchi Emecheta for instance declares:

I am a feminist with a small "f" , I love men and good men are the salt of the earth. But to tell me that we should abolish marriage like the capital "F" [feminist] women who say women should live together and all that, I say no. Personally I'd like to see the ideal, happy marriage. But if it doesn't work, for goodness sake call it off (Kolawole, 11).

Surprisingly enough, Buchi Emecheta has suffered a lot from marriage. She has been given to the most generous suitor whose family has invested in her because as a literate woman, she produces an income. Determined to escape the yoke of her husband's family, she goes to join him in Great Britain. But once there, before knowing what happens, she finds herself with five children at the early twenties. It would be easier to live with the help of her husband, Francis, but lazy as he is, she is the main supporter of the family. She has to nourish, take care of her children's health with her own money and at the same time pay for Francis's studies. She both suffers from sexist and racist oppression. Thus, Emecheta's defence of an institution such as marriage, after all that she has endured, is praiseworthy but not surprising enough, merely because she has conserved her basic African values. Actually this is the main principle of womanism :

Womanism does not require compartmentalization and one does not need to identify radical, liberal, psycho-analytic and other categories of womanism. Any African woman who has the consciousness to situate the struggle within African cultural realities by working for a total and robust self-retrieval of the African woman is an African or Africana womanist (Kolawole, 34).

Kolawole opposes feminism with its numerous trends to womanism within which any African female, aware of her Africanity, feels at ease to fight voicelessness of women in the black continent. The Senegalese female scholar Siga Jajne, identifies patriarchy and colonialism as the two factors which have caused it. To fight against voicelessness, she advocates the Senegalese concept "Sani Baat" (i.e voice throwing):

I believe that by 'throwing' in one's voice, a disruption of discourse can take place. The act of 'throwing' one's voice can create an epistemic violence to discourse that will create a space for hitherto unheard voices. The problem that will arise from such an action will be the appropriation of this voice within the particular discourse it interrupts, an act that may or may not render it mute (Kolawole, 7).

Thus she does not affirm that "Sani Baat" is the radical solution but instead may resolve female voicelessness.

Nevertheless, voicelessness has to be nuanced because some critics assert that literary theorists especially African females fail to look where they should to hear women's voices. Ogunjipe Leslie, talking about rural females states :

We neither look for their voices where they utter them nor do we think it worthwhile to listen to their voices. We sometimes substitute our voices for their own and we do not even know when we do this nor are we able to recognize the differences in the mixed or substituted voices (Kolawole, 9).

It is clear that to be trustworthy, any philosophical, ideological, sociological or literary theory has to include all the groups. But we have to recognize that significant progress has been made above all in the sociological and literary fields. In Senegal for instance, the most popular female association Yeewu Yeewi, urges women to get rid of male sexist oppression, and work to gain their economic independence. The feminist literary theory in Africa has to include :

Women to whom a rapid political or theoretical movement forward has usually seemed beside the point – poor women, peasant women, and women who for any number of reasons identify themselves not as feminists but as militant mothers fighting for

their survival (Ann Snitow, 20).

White middle-class women's theories could only ignore the hard economic realities of the African female peasant. The latter does not need to claim her rights for labor because she already works as much and hard as men. However, "the invincible hands of the World Bank because of the side-effects of the International Monetary Fund are [sometimes] more real to her suffering than gender division" (Kolawole, 12).

Indeed, African women have faced realities different from and harder than their western counterparts. They have experienced a patriarchal tradition, colonialism and then neo-colonialism, racism, and gender favoritism. Thus black female intellectuals, central in the theory because they are both women and black, such as Clenora Hudson-Weems, have developed ideologies "created and designed for all women of African descent, ... grounded in African culture, and therefore, ... necessarily focus on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of African women" (Kolawole, 25).

Somehow, comparing all the experiences she has lived, the black woman has suffered more in slavery. While the white woman was pampered in order to stay sophisticated as long as possible, the black woman was submitted to hard-working, rape, whipping etc. In response to white male chilvary to women, Sojourner Truth declared in a speech in 1851:

Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man -- when I could get it -- and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have born thirteen children, and see them most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman? (Collins, 14).

She has indeed shown the paradox in western countries during slavery. Her womanhood does not prevent the white man from assigning her the same work as man. It does not spare her the lash either. And to emphasize the injustice of slavery she goes on repeating the leitmotif "ain't I a woman?". But the worst of

all is the selling of her children. And many black feminist theorists have dealt with motherhood during slavery. Hooks declares in *Conflicts in Feminism* that:

Overly, the enslaved mother is the locus of [the] sharpest distinction between biology and gender, between ungendered black 'female bodies in the raw' and the white 'gendered female' defined preeminently in terms of a revered maternity. Reproduction under slavery is breeding, not maternity; denied all maternal claims to her children, the enslaved mother simply increases her owner's stock (189).

Hooks has in fact considered the natural paired poles biology / gender. Concerning the black woman, the white man totally ignores the second. She is simply an animal, assigned by nature to be the black race breeder. She just is a "body" and as such, is devoid of the minor moral values and decency granted to womanhood by all civilizations. As far as she does not own herself, she has no rights on her children who are her master's property. As for the white woman, as her primary use is to be ornamental, once she produces heirs for the master, she loads onto the black matriarch the nursing of her offspring. However, she has had an essential place in black womanist literature and has played several roles:

*One, as the preserver of African extended family, second, as the repository and distributor of family history, wisdom, and Black lore; and third, as the retainer and communicator of values and ideals which support and enhance her personhood, her family, and her community (Davies, *Ngambika*, 258).*

Such an affirmation is perfectly illustrated by Baby Suggs in *Beloved*. Her house is described as "where not one but two pots simmered on the stove; where the lamp burned all night long. Strangers rested there while children tried on their shoes. Messages were left there, for whoever needed them was sure to stop in one day soon" (*Beloved*, 87).

In addition, Sethe's character is considered embodying black womanist self-sufficiency. Indeed, she is described as a strong woman, totally independent in handling her life. She expresses all the womanist characteristics listed by Alice Walker: "outrageous, audacious, courageous, willful behaviour, love of struggle,

regardless" (*In Search of Our Mother's Garden*, xii).

She does not obey her mother-in-law who recommends to her: "lay em down, Sethe. Sword and shield. Both of em down.... Don't study war no more. Lay all that mess down" (*Beloved*, 86).

In fact, all over the text, Sethe Suggs has not had at anytime a sheltering. She has a very strong will increased by her children's safety and her own love for them. Her answer to Paul D who finds her love "too thick" is as illustrative as possible "what he know about it? Who in the world is he willing to die for? Would he give his privates to a stranger in return for a craving?" (203).

Her reaction highlights the place of the womanist theme, motherhood, in Morrison's work. Sethe has a resolute tough love for her children. Morrison has also developed other womanist themes such as black kinship and sisterhood. Fellowship is in fact very important in the novel. In Paul D's memories, life in Sweet Home has been as sweet as possible before Schoolteacher came because he had Paul A, Paul B, Paul C, Sixo and Halle Suggs and later on Sethe. In addition, black people have set a chain toward freedom for the fugitives; Stamp Paid, Ella, John, Baby Suggs and the whole community have each one a role to play in helping. Sethe herself, after getting out of jail, is not resented by the community because of the murder itself but because she makes "no gesture toward anybody, and lives as though she were alone" (*Beloved*, 258). And Baby Suggs decides to abandon after the baby's murder and refuses to go to the "clearing" and give the "call" because if the whole community has failed to warn her of the coming of Schoolteacher, it is out of jealousy and meanness.

As for Bessie Head, even though her texts denounce women's victimhood, she refused the feminist label. But for critics such as Eilersen, her being out of touch with the newly emerging feminist movement did not prevent her "own original thought process" to bring her "very close to the religious revolution that feminists in Western countries were advocating in the 70s" (127). But it may be

explained by the fact that Bessie Head received the greater part of her education in an Anglican institution even though she once declared after the hard way the principal revealed to her her mixed origins, that she had from then on "harboured a terrible and blind hatred for missionaries and the Christianity which they represented" (MacKenzie, 4). She maintained belonging to those for whom man is central in existence but not God. Nevertheless she confessed that:

The independence of women is certainly a needed thing; it overcomes problems of prostitution and if a woman is independent financially it gives her time to find out if she really loves a man and is not merely dependent on him for support (Eilersen, 237).

For Bessie Head, liberation means financial independence because many women hang on men for materialistic reasons. And it is important as well because with some revenues, women would not need prostituting themselves to survive. In addition Bessie Head declared once that *A Question Of Power* can be considered by a liberationist woman: "pure liberation illuminating some dark and hidden intent on the part of the male of the species to eliminate the female of the species" (252). But she stated in response that she "didn't think up a sex war. It was the truth. The men are just like that and the women suffer" (Eilersen, 237).

But the fact is that Bessie Head's description of men is so much near that of feminist theories. She clearly differentiates women's world from that of men. Tom an American Peace Corps volunteer states in *A Question Of Power*:

You're a strange woman, Elizabeth. The things you draw out of a man! You know men don't really discuss the deep metaphysical profundities with women. Oh, they talk about love and things like that, but their deepest feelings they reserve for other men (24).

Generally, when one marries, it is the result of love but more, there should exist a tender complicity which allows the couple to deal with any topic, metaphysical or not. But for Elizabeth: "men just [don't] get that close, and she had really decided to marry because she was getting old, and tired of sitting in libraries with books. Thus expectantly, her marriage does not last long. She just

"one day walked out of the house and never saw [her husband] again" (90).

But, the womanist theme, sisterhood, has a great importance in the plot. Elizabeth seems complex to understand and her relations with the other female characters are difficult either for that reason or her hybridity. But there is a female character, she herself confesses:

Was to remember...with deep affection. She was the only part of the nightmare that could express normal, human feelings.... She always looked at Elizabeth as though she knew what friendship between women were like (129).

Though she is one of Dan's numerous concubines, whom he uses just to torture her, Elizabeth finds her "human feelings" and even friendly. She maintains friendship with another local woman, Kenosi. Whenever she is near the chaos, Kenosi saves her and Elizabeth once puzzled exclaims: "the way this woman [brings me] back to life and reality" (142).

Elizabeth has a tiny circle of friends who bind her to the sane world. And often after a whole night spent with her hallucinations, she recovers with the help of Kenosi, Tom or Shorty. Nonetheless, one year before her death Bessie Head cleared her standpoint once for all in declaring that:

I'm not a feminist in the sense that I do not view women in isolation from men.... I view my own activity as a writer as a kind of participation in the thought of the whole world.... Writing is not male / female occupation...I do not have to be a feminist. The world of the intellect is impersonal, sexless (MacKenzie, 95).

Bessie Head firmly refused her work to be categorized feminist or black. In fact, she denounced victimhood in all its forms and defended the weakest but considered writing a gift independent from any label. From her perspective, all human beings, man, woman, children are for some use in life, the point is their being good or evil "if all my living could be summarised I would call it knowledge of evil, knowledge of its sources, of its true face and the misery and sufferings it inflicts on human life" (MacKenzie, 63).

In short, Feminism as an ideology has given birth to many literary theories. Indeed:

Feminists are seen as ranging from biologically determined – as is the case in radical feminist thought, which argues that only women can be feminists – to notions of feminists as individuals who have undergone some type of political transformation theoretically achievable by anyone (Collins, 20).

Some theorists have in fact supported the idea that only women can defend female interests and be feminists. And extremists have gone further to claim that women's victimhood will exist as long as they live in a male-centered world. Hence females should set a world apart entirely made of women themselves, in other words a lesbian world.

Other theorists, on the contrary, recognize man's centrality in life but favour women's rights. Some of them affirm that feminism is not necessarily related to the biological sex and that men also may be feminists. But the racist hints of western theories have made African and African American females find other ways to fight victimhood. In fact, western literary theorists have first totally ignored black female victimhood and then they have failed to discern the socio-cultural and economic differences. African scholars have even asked:

Why did we want to name ourselves feminist when we could be "African" and exotic to the researcher and . . . or feminist who was fascinated by the continued inscriptions of pre-capitalist patriarchal notions of womanhood and motherhood, in particular, upon and through the black bodies of this continent? (Mc Fadden, 2).

Black women have lived historical events which have shaped their cultural, economic and political realities, and white women – or at least, in their great majority – have lived them from the privileged side. Thus black females have set a black feminist thought which consists of: "specialized knowledge created by African-American women which clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women. In other words Black feminist thought encompasses theoretical interpretations of Black women's reality by those who live it" (Collins, 22).

For Raman Selden and Peter Widdowson: "five main foci are involved in most discussions of sexual difference: biology; experience; discourse; the unconscious; and social and economic conditions" but psychoanalyst theorists in particular, have put the emphasis on the subject's psychology.

In fact, womanists and even feminists in general have remarked "the traditional indifference of psychoanalysis to racial, class, and cultural differences" (Abel, 184). But for Abel, it is necessary to introduce such dimensions in the theory as far as the social reality differs from place to place and she also finds psychoanalytical ideas applicable to the black womanist landscape.

Lacanian discourse has accurately developed the idea of the mother-daughter bond. According to it, gender is determined by domesticity, in other words, the black slave mother for instance who ignores the scheme mother-father-daughter is deprived of gender, she is just a "body" (Abel, 188). The black slave infant's identity is mostly shaped by its relationship with its mother's eyes and further the black slave father is not the establisher of "The Law of the Father".

Irigaray finds woman's inability to represent her identity in positive terms due to the linguistic system and if we consider Sethe's relationship with Beloved from this perspective, the bond mother/daughter is deformed by the symbolic order which forbids a slave mother to consider her children as her property and demonstrate such a strong and exclusive love for them. The diminution of the meaning of motherhood in patriarchal American culture has led Sethe to lose the boundaries between mother/daughter as individuals beings. For psychoanalysts, it explains the "risk for women of a compensating over-investment in 'self-denial, in non-being, or in over possessive maternity" (Morris, 129).

Hence, "a new language which can represent the mother as also a woman, which can construct a maternal identity that includes sexuality as fullness" is needed by black womanists (130). Further, Morris adds that such a language

would at last "allow both mother and daughter a separate identity while maintaining the loving unity of the maternal bond" and black women are creating it more and more in theater, poetry and prose. The reality Toni Morrison has dealt with in *Beloved* is slavery and its aftermath on the community, especially on mothers. In doing so, she has underlined many womanist themes as motherhood, indeed, sisterhood, black kinship.

While for Morrison, freedom means that she can choose, and has actually chosen "to be a free Black American writer" (Kathy Sun, 2), Bessie Head, has refused such a label. She believes that concentration is on "mankind in general, and black people fit in there, not as special freaks and oddities outside the scheme of things, with labels like Black Power or any rubbish of that kind" (*A Question Of Power*, 133). Despite the sensitivity she has shown for oppressed people, especially Blacks and women, she has till the end refused to be qualified a black or feminist writer.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS

3.0 - Introduction

Women's victimhood has been described mainly in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Bessie Head's *A Question Of Power* from three perspectives. In the United States of America and South Africa, the racial issue has been determinant in life generally. Indeed, the complexion of people has influenced their total being in such societies. On the one hand there have been white people, on the other black people. But within the last group there has been another smaller group composed of females who have been submitted to a second oppression based this time on gender categorization. But Morrison and Head show us an insight into women's psychological responses to such situations.

3.1- THE WOMAN AS A RACIAL VICTIM

The most painful period in black history has been the enslavement of Black people by Whites. Slavery has in fact been a colour-based institution. Scholars have stated that two hundred million died as a result of it and the smallest number is sixty million. Toni Morrison has chosen *Beloved* as a dedication to this violence on the black race. In the novel, we have two time sequences: a present (1873-1874) and a past (1850-1855). Thus *Beloved* is set before and immediately after emancipation. Baby Suggs, the black matriarch of the novel has lived "sixty years a slave and ten years free", but the lesson she has gained from such life is that "there [is] no bad luck in the world but white-people. They don't know when to stop" (*Beloved*, 106).

In the same way, Bessie Head has characterized racial victimhood in South Africa. Shortly after this country was declared a free Republic in May 31st, 1961, Apartheid was institutionalized. From then on, racial barriers were set and black people had to leave and settle in the townships. A series of acts were legalized among which was the Immorality Act which forbade sexual intercourse between white women and black men in order to keep the race pure. Another act which deepened black people's victimization was the Migrant Labor Law which stated that white families could for instance have a single maid at home but once she got married, she had to have a pass and leave for the townships after her work. Elizabeth describes the political atmosphere in South

Africa as a "back-breaking life of all black people in South Africa". In fact, they have lived with a continual "nervous tension because [they] did not know why white people there had to go out of their way to hate or loathe you. They were just born that way, hating people, and a black man or woman was just born to be hated" (*A Question Of Power*, 19). Questioning these rights, she asks if it

is because "they seem to themselves to be most supreme, most god-like, most wonderful, most cherished" (19). Head is surely alluding to the white man's considering colonialism a divine mission to bring civilization to the black and wild peoples of Africa. To explain such an injustice, it is the unique pretext they have found for the wide public opinion in Europe.

In fact, female and male blacks are victimized in *Beloved* and *A Question Of Power* on the racial level. In South Africa, blacks are said to be "naturally dull, stupid, inferior" but the white men "[make] sure to deprive [them] of the type of education which [develops] personality, intellect, skill" (*A Question Of Power*, 57).

Indeed, black men have been restricted to menial services and women to housekeeping. Education is found "unnecessary if not illegal" for black people (*Beloved*, 104). The main reason is that blacks are not considered conscious beings, actually for Schoolteacher, they join "human characteristics" to "animal" ones (193). Black men and women cannot be considered humans and it is the reason why though there are four black male slaves able to run out Sweet Home, Mrs Garner calls her brother-in-law, Schoolteacher because "people [say] she shouldn't be alone out there with nothing but Negroes" (197). Once he comes to Sweet Home, Schoolteacher "puts things in order" (9). On the one hand, black males suffer from the new order. First, he does not any more admit what Mr Garner allowed in his living: to have guns, to voice their mind and he settles down to "reeducate them", making Paul D ask if in calling them "men... Mr Garner was naming what he saw or creating what he did?" (222).

In fact, male slaves are considered and even called not men but boys. It is as if slavery had stripped them of their manhood. Actually, it has been the same in almost all the black communities oppressed by white people. Indeed, in *A Question Of Power*, the black man, in a racist society, is deprived of his virility and one asks :

How can a man be a man when he is called boy? I can barely retain my own manhood...the boer policeman said to me: "Hey, boy, where's your pass?"... Am I a man to my girl or a boy? Another man addresses me as boy. How do you think I feel? (45).

Actually, white male oppressive ways have seriously undermined black manhood. Morrison also has made it clear that Paul D has suffered a lot from racial victimization through powerful and significant imagery. With his other slave mates, they take a tree and name it brother to symbolize the absence of the "Other" being with which to talk, discuss at Sweet Home. They need the presence of women not only for physical sexual needs because they abuse cows everyday, but also psychologically as complements for themselves, in other words, as loving and attentive companions. Further his manhood is made more absurd by the rooster Mister. When Paul D is taken away, chained, to be sold, he is sure that Mister is smiling:

My head was full of what I'd seen of Halle a while back.... Just Halle and before him Sixo, but when I saw Mister I knew it was me too. Not just them, me too. One crazy, one sold, one missing, one burnt and me licking iron with my hands crossed behind me. The last of Sweet Home men (72).

Yet, he Paul D, has saved Mister from death because it couldn't get out of the Shell as it was abandoned by the hen. But, Mister is what Paul D cannot be, the male of its species:

Mister was allowed to be and stay what he was. But I wasn't allowed to be and stay what I was. Even if you cooked him you'd be cooking a rooster named Mister. But wasn't no way I'd ever be Paul D again, living or dead. Schoolteacher changed me. I was something else and that something less than a chicken sitting in the sun on a tub (72).

Then, Mister is allowed as an animal to be and stay a male. Even the animals they are compared with have more freedom in the novel. For Trudier, Mister is what Paul D can never become. Further, he is the living characterization of freedom and malehood which are both forbidden to Paul D.

Thus in the same way, black males have suffered from victimhood but, females' oppression and their responses to it are central in the two novels. In *Beloved*, women like Ella have "measured all atrocities [,] killing, kidnap, rape" put on women (258). She has spent her whole puberty time in a house where she has been used sexually by both a father and his son. The hard physical treatment she has been subjected to has left her with "scars" and some lacking "bottom teeth she had lost to the brake" and a "digust for sex". The white men, whom she calls "lowest yet" have fathered a "hairy white thing" which will die five days later because she has refused to nurse it (258-259). She has almost acted like Sethe's own mother who has delivered various times but has "thrown them all away" because she has been raped by the crew or other whites. Sethe is the only one she has kept with her because she is the child of the black man and she "put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never"(62).

She prefers to kill her children because if they had grown, they would have perpetually reminded her of her rape. But Sethe herself has had all her children not in the same way but in "what they called married back there and back then" (58).

Once they decide themselves on marrying, she enthusiastically asks Mrs Garner about the wedding ceremony, to which she answers "you are a sweet little child" (26). Right then, Sethe do not understand that as slaves, they just have to settle down with someone and increase their owner's weath. She will recall later to her daughters:

Nothing. I thought there should be something - something to say it was right and true. I didn't want it to be just me bringing my night bucket into his cabin. I thought there should be some ceremony. ... But it wasn't going to be nothing. They said it was all right for us to be husband and wife that was it. All of it (58-59).

No "ceremony", "no preacher", "no dancing", it really makes the fourteen-year-old-girl feel bad. She fails to understand that it was enough for blacks and that

Garner's slaves are well-treated because "he [doesn't] stud his slaves. Never [bring] them to [women's] cabin with directions to lay down with them,...or [rent] their sex out on other farms" (140).

Actually, Garner's ordering his slaves "not to leave Sweet Home except in his company, was not so much because of the law, but the danger of men-bred slaves on the loose (141). Similarly, for safety reasons, Paul D cannot "throw a helpless colored girl out in territory infected by the Klan" because "desperately thirsty for black blood, without which it [can] not live, the dragon [swims] the Ohio at will" (66). An erring black woman caught by the Ku Klux Klan's members was submitted to the worst tortures. In fact, the security of the Blacks was made precarious since the Fugitive Slave Law was adopted in 1850. It legalized the kidnapping and enslavement of any black person anywhere in the United States. The abolition of slavery however, resulting from the victory of the North during the Civil War hardly changed anything :

Eighteen seventy-four and white folks were still on the loose. Whole town wiped clean of Negroes; eighty-seven lynchings in one year alone in Kentucky; four colored schools burned to the ground; grown men whipped like children; children whipped like adults; black women raped by the crew; property taken, necks broken (*Beloved*, 180).

For Elizabeth, it is really paradoxical when white men say they are "worshippers of Jesus Christ" and then lynch black people and commit so many atrocities (*A Question Of Power*, 92). Though slavery ended officially since 1865, some white men continued to resent the Secession War's supporters. Indeed, black people were held responsible for any Southerner (or even Northerner sometimes) soldier who died during it. For instance, Sawyer, Sethe's employer, "used to be a sweet man" he was "patient, tender in his dealings with his help. But each year, following the death of his son in the war, he grew more and more crotchety. As though Sethe's dark face was to blame" (*Beloved*, 191). He just considers the fact that the Unionists had fought the Secessionists to end slavery and that

many black men had supported the North. Thus he resents Blacks for the death of their soldiers but does not analyse once the damages done by institutionalized slavery on the black race.

Actually, skin colour has predetermined the relationships between Blacks and Whites in America or anywhere else like in South Africa. In this country for instance, a series of acts have been officialized after the adoption of Apartheid in 1948. Among them, one can mention the Immorality Act (1957) which forbade sexual relations between different races. And people, like Elizabeth who are the result of such crimes have to bear the stigma during all their lifetime. Fearing scandal, her maternal family has rejected her but her grandmother has insisted many times on seeing her in spite of one of her son's outburst : "we want to wash our hands of this business. We want to forget it" (*A Question Of Power*, 17). But as far as such visits are against her offspring's will, she will soon drop away from her grandchild's life. As a grown-up, Elizabeth's exclusion makes her remark that people have "cried out so often in agony against racial hatred and oppressions of all kinds" (*A Question Of Power*, 53). She goes further asking if South Africa is not "the only area in the world where truthful statements [can] be made about the white man's hatred of the black man because it [is] such an established and accepted thing" (83).

Indeed, the white man's superiority is so much grounded on laws and institutions that it seems natural and the worst according to Elizabeth is that "the victim of racial attitude cannot think of the most coherent and correct thing to do to change the heart of evil" (84). To fight against racist oppression, the victim may use violence but for Elizabeth it does not change a lot, because he is not the "origin of the poison". She grants freedom to the oppressed and argues that he is freed from thinking up "endeless laws and endless falsehoods" and is just "presented" with them (84). Thus, white men are oppressed not by another stronger race but by their evil nature which leads them to enjoy superiority and

"live off other people's souls like vultures" (19). For her, the good nature of the oppressed help them pass through "a thousand and one hells" the oppressors make them live. And while the faces of the first "are not ugly", but only "scarred with suffering", the torturers "become more hideous day by day" (84).

Actually, being oppressed does not undermine people's nobility whereas oppressing other human beings effectively does. It is the reason why Elizabeth seems to notice greatness and value in the oppressed "man who cries, broken by anguish" but not in "his scoffing, mocking, jeering oppressor" (84). Oppressors take great pleasure in humiliating people, like Camilla does with Elizabeth and the native students in the vegetable garden. Small Boy, one of them, has started explaining to Elizabeth the methods with an "air of quiet, authoritative, manly calm" (76) before Camilla's arrival. Her exclamation full of self-importance and superiority about black people's laziness humiliates the students. For Elizabeth, Camilla's problem is that she never sees "black people as people but as objects of permanent idiocy" (76). Elizabeth has listened to Small Boy, eager and ready to learn something new from him, but Camilla first assumes that blacks are idiotic and ignorants, she comments: "I don't understand these people. They don't know anything at all, and they're so lazy..." (78). In fact, Camilla has just reproduced the stereotyped images of Blacks by Whites. Elizabeth remarks:

She takes the inferiority of the black man so much for granted that she thinks nothing of telling us straight to our faces we are stupid and don't know anything. There's so many like her. They don't see the shades and shadows of life on black people's faces (82).

Black persons are seen by Camilla as inferior beings unable to even understand their status. For her, telling them directly their "stupidity" does not arouse any feeling in them because of their idiocy. For Elizabeth, people like Camilla don't see the marks left by various experiences on black people's faces. The drought for instance, has resulted in starvation because of a weakened agriculture and thus has printed misery on the face of every Botswana person. But

Camilla considers black people as gregarious beings with no intellectual aptitude at all. Elizabeth's literacy does not change a lot because :

She [thrusts] her down too. She [flings] information at her in such a way as to make it totally incomprehensible and meaningless, subtly demonstrating that to reach her level of education Elizabeth [has] to be able to grasp the incoherence (76).

Camilla believes so much her intellectual superiority that she does nothing to make things easier for Elizabeth. Instead of giving her definite explanations, she just graps the notebook out of her hands and scribbles her own notes. But surprisingly enough, even if it is "really hatred at first sight,...the woman [seems] entirely unaware of it" (76).

It seems that Camilla has internalized deep in her consciousness that she is, as she is white, the superior being and blacks the inferior ones. Toni Morrison has analysed it in an interview with Bonnie Angelo as "a question of education, because racism is a scholarly pursuit... that's not the way people were born to live". And she talks "about racism that is taught, institutionalized" (3).

The truth in such affirmation relies on the fact that people like Camilla are unconscious of their injustice and come to Africa with deep racial prejudices. Elizabeth believes that all human beings are "at heart, amateur scientists and inventors" so she asks "why must racialists make an exception of the black man?" and why Camilla comes to "help the black man with special approach: ha, ha, ha, you're never going to come up to our level of civilization" (83).

Whites come in Bostwana to support natives in developing processes but concede them no chance to show their intelligence. In fact, Camilla really believes in white civilization's hegemony because she informs Elizabeth that in her country, "culture has become so complex" that it is "reflected in [their] literature" and it "takes a certain level of education to understand" their novelists. Their "minds reflect the complexity" of their culture and indeed, "the ordinary man can not understand them" (79). It is obvious that "ordinary man" stands for

Elizabeth in particular and black people in general. Camilla is convinced that Africans cannot understand the expressions of European culture in arts, literature, economy etc. In fact, Camilla is "stone-deaf and blind" about African's natural gifts (82) but while she complains about people's laziness and stupidity, she likes her house so much that she decides to stay another year again. Elizabeth, "incredulously" notices "houses [are] loved, [but] not people" (78). In her house, Camilla has seen some beauty to admire but if she had looked at people to know them and she would may be find out some quality to like. For Elizabeth, the feelings of a victim "are not taken into account", he/she is "disregarded by the torturer or oppressor that for centuries evils are perpetrated with no one being aghast or put to shame" (98).

Elizabeth's dilemma resides in the fact that she is both rejected by the white European community and the black African one. Whereas Camilla considers her a "native", it is worse on the black side because they do not regard her as an African. One of her torturers, Medusa warns her "Africa is troubled waters. I'm a powerful swimmer in troubled waters. You'll only drown here. You're not linked up to the people. You don't know any African languages" (44).

Elizabeth cannot enjoy the "joy of being a human being with a personality" for there are "races, not people". She has first thought it only existed in the South African society but she has discovered segregation again in Botswana where she is "definetely [...] an out-and-out outsider" and will never "be in one their things" (26). Elizabeth is reminded again and again that she is a "dog, filth" (45) in Serowe where she settled after her exile. She has fled apartheid in South Africa to discover racism and segregation in Black African community. The greatest dilemma of hybrid people has been a problem of self-definition. They are persecuted by either community and consider themselves accident of nature. For the last reason, Elizabeth fears her own image in the mirror because she fears to

see an "unnamable horror there and she [can] not endure to look at it" (46). Elizabeth has been so much victimized that she loses self-confidence and develops a complex of racial but also sexual inferiority because of Dan's constant comments: "I go with all these women because we are not made the same way" (147).

However, women's victimhood on the racial level has gone alongside sufferings on the gender level.

3.2- THE WOMAN AS A GENDER VICTIM

Black womanhood was a very awkward notion during slavery in the United States. Indeed, on the one hand black women "could not achieve the standard of womanhood", on the other hand "they were biologically females, with all the societal restrictions associated with that state" (Barbara Christian, 71). As far as they are "neither white nor male, all freedom and triumph [is] forbidden to them" (*Sula*, 44). Their colour classifies them within the inferior race and their biological sex confines them in the lowest status. As females, they are considered brainless by most black men like Joe Starks:

Somebody got to think for women and chillun and cows. I god, they sho don't think none theirselves [women folks] just think they's thinking. When Ah see one thing Ah understands ten. You [his wife] see ten things and don't understand one
(Hurston, *T. E. W. W. G.*, 110-111).

Actually, to feel reassured in his manhood, the black male needs to know someone under his authority. The black woman lives motherhood as the most painful moment in her life as a slave. For Ella "if anybody was to ask [her she'd] say, don't love nothing" (92). Baby Suggs has understood it too late. Everybody she knew in the past "let alone loved, who hadn't run off or been hanged, [had been] rented out, bought up, brought back, stored up, mortgaged, won, stolen or seized" (23). Hence, her eight children are fathered by six different men. Baby Suggs compares the life of a slave with a giant cheker-board and discovers the "nastiness of life" when she learns that "nobody stops playing checkers just because the pieces include her children" (23). She has lost all her children in slavery but one whom she has kept a "lifetime: twenty years" with her. All her children were sold in early infancy so she finds Sethe's act too proud and egocentric: "Sethe [has] the amazing luck of six whole years of marriage to that 'somebody' son who had fathered every one of her children. A blessing she was

reckless enough to take for granted" (23).

For Baby Suggs, Sethe has underestimated her luck. She has her whole family with her and has the chance to see her offspring grow up whereas she has vague memories of her own children, sold in their great majority before their weaning time: "my first-born. All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that's all I remember" (*Beloved*, 5).

In fact, Sethe in her need to unify her family is caught by her slave owner. She refuses to let him sully them as he has done to her, so she kills her third child, a baby girl and hurts the two elders. Her strong feelings are contrary to the slave ethics as it is stated by Paul D:

*For a used-to-be-slave woman to love anything that much was dangerous, especially if it was her children she had settled on to love. The best thing, he knew, was to love just a little bit ; everything, just a little bit (*Beloved*, 45).*

But Sethe has made up her mind, she will not let the white men sully her children like they have already done with her. They might "dirty her all right, but not her best thing, her beautiful, magical best thing- the part of her that was clean" (251).

When she first plans to escape, Schoolteacher finds out her motive and she is whipped without any concern for her pregnancy. She refuses to ponder later on "whether a gang of whites[have] invaded her daughter's private parts, soiled her daughters thighs and thrown her out of the wagon" (251).

In fact, Sethe has been herself "dirtied" so much that she cannot like herself anymore. She uses a metaphor "and they took my milk" to reveal her rape by Schoolteachers' nephews. When their uncle discovers that she has denounced them to Mrs Garner, he makes one "open [her] back and when it [closes], it [makes] a tree" (17). To spare the baby, they dig a hole for her belly.

From then on, Sethe's unique concern is to "put her babies were they would be safe" (164). Sethe's motherlove leads her to kill her daughter. She does not reflect as an individual but as a mother first. It is also the reason why she has agreed to let the engraver use her sexually ten minutes to carve a word "Beloved" on the headstone. Indeed, she:

Thought it would be enough, rutting among the headstones with the engraver, his young son looking on, the anger in his face so old; the appetite in it quite new. That should certainly be enough. Enough to answer one more preacher, one more abolitionist and a town full of disgust (5).

In that word Sethe wants her strong maternal love embodied. Indeed, motherhood during slavery has been so much undervalued that Sethe's reaction has surprised the whole community. During the Reconstruction period as well, resulting from black male authoritative oppression, females like Sethe: "aggressive, assertive...are penalized. They are abandoned by their men, end up impoverished, and are stigmatized as being unfeminine" (Collins, 75). The newly black male authority considers femininity as deeply related to soft and obedient ways. Their manhood has been denied for centuries, thus they need dull beings under their yoke. Sethe believes that:

They [encourage] you to put some of your weight in their hands as soon as you [feel] how light and lovely that [is], they [study] your scars and tribulations, after which they [do] what he has done: [run] her children out and [torn] up the house (22).

Paul D is the kind of man who "can walk into a house and make the women cry" according to the narrator. Therefore, when he holds Sethe's "breast in the palms of his hands", she feels relieved because "the responsibility for her breasts, at last, [is] in somebody else's hands" (18).

Actually, Sethe's "breast" stand for her womanhood. She has been victimized first and foremost by her exclusive love for her children. During all this time, she has bowed under her responsibilities as a mother. And the fact is

that she has considered them very seriously. It is why she resents Halle so much because he has let the "two boys with mossy teeth, one sucking on [her] breasts the other holding [her] down, their book reading teacher watching and writing it up" while he, her "husband was watching, above [her] in the loft—hiding close by.... Looking down on what [she] couldn't look at all. And not stopping them. Looking and letting it happen" (70).

Sethe's womanhood is violated by the rape she has lived and her husband's, the father of the owners of the "milk", observing and not acting to stop it. Hence, she ends believing Baby Suggs affirmation: "a man ain't nothing but a man. But a son? Well now, that's somebody" (23). Sethe is convinced that if Halle had not been her husband but instead her son, he would not have let them sully her.

But the point is that according to her, Halle has been "more like a brother than a husband". Like Paul D, he has looked at her "not loving or passionate, but interested, as though he were examining an ear of corn for quality" (25). Actually, it is as if slavery had stripped black women of their femininity. Amy Denver for instance addresses an old woman "old nigger girl" and Paul D himself calls Sethe "girl" whereas she is about forty. Hence, the black woman is not only victimized because of her gender but this definite status is denied to her.

However, Sethe's need for love is nothing compared to Elizabeth's. She longs for love which beyond its perfect nature, "includes all mankind" and "equalizes all things and all men" (*Beloved*, 202). Elizabeth lives persecuted by many torturers among whom is her "twin soul" (11) Sello. He pursues her with hellish visions to let her know about the prophecies they share together. Sello is according to Elizabeth a "killer" of women. He announces her that he killed one of them because "she was like a raging beast" but she finally turned into being "quite harmless" (28). His detached way when he announces it suggests that he cannot stand strong and contemptuous women. It is as if his manhood cannot

support female self confidence and may only be expressed with dull women. To emphasize her victimization, he introduces Medusa, his wife. She, with Sello "Sello in the brown suit" who is the projection of "Sello in the monk ", will show her what really hell means for she is its creator. Elizabeth, finally finds out that the lynch mob in the United States, are not followers of Jesus Christ but of Medusa because they have the same smile as she has. Elizabeth's victimhood is deepened when Medusa throws at her her last bolt, quietening her: "you will love it. Dan is so beautiful" (93).

The latter's promise to help her will not last long. He will parade each night one or more women of his seventy-one mistresses. He victimizes Elizabeth by his constant accusations and scornful derision: "look, I'm going to show you how I sleep with B....she has a womb I can't forget. When I go with a woman I go for an hour. You can't do that. You haven't got a vagina" (13).

Together with his friends, Dan will aim at showing her her sexual inferiority. In fact, to better control her, Dan has first shown her what love should be with him. It should mean two persons, joined in an eternal embrace, symbolized by two trees entwined at the roots and a roaring and feeding river. The narrator comments on Elizabeth as an "incredibly stupid [woman], so impressionable that her mind could take great leaps into wild dangers without perceiving them as such" (114).

It is Dan himself who will not let her believe in such a romantic and ideal love because his power and sexual lust are so strong. But actually, Elizabeth is Sello's instrument to observe Dan and Medusa. He lets them victimize her to better lessen their power later. Sello has first manipulated Medusa to observe Elizabeth. But finally, Medusa is unfit for his methods: she carries too much violence and ignores goodness. For Elizabeth, Medusa is one of those women who trap "men in their own passions"; she symbolizes a "power outside themselves that [can] invade and destroy them" (98). She "hath hissing serpents

for her hair and her face turneth the beholder into stone" as it is recorded by "shuddering mankind" (40). Medusa may stand for a demonic image of woman created by men in patriarchal societies to represent women as evil beings who need men to become good.

Medusa is described as the incarnation of strong and powerful women once, but she has turned, in the same way as all other concubines of men like Sello, into the kind of women to cry and wipe their men's "feet with their long black hair". She belongs to the women he has "killed" to control them, thus Medusa is herself a victim of men's power. In fact, man's fighting Medusa is because she symbolizes "the direct and tangible form of his own evils, his power lusts, his greed, his self-importance, and these dominate him totally and bring him to the death of the soul" (40).

Dan has also victimized Elizabeth who finds that "the social defects he [heightens] in himself", indicate him as "the epitome of the African male". For Elizabeth, Dan embodies all the characteristics of African manhood, in other words a "loose, carefree sexuality [which] hasn't the stopgaps of love and tenderness and personal romantic treasuring of women". She nevertheless finds it unobscene as far as "women have a corresponding mental and physical approach" (137).

In fact, her repulsion for relations based on sexual attraction is first felt through her brief marriage. She has married a man, one week after their first encounter. It has "seemed perfectly all right, to marry someone interested in philosophies" for her. Instead of marrying someone she loves and who loves her as well, she marries a man who pretends to be interested in equality and mankind. Thus a month later, women complain of "being molested by her husband" and she also finds out that he has a white boy-friend (19).

So, women have suffered from undervalued status in societies ruled by patriarchal white or black leaders. Such victimization has sometimes been carried

out not only by male but also by female counterparts or the social system itself. Hence, sufferings resulting from racial oppression and gender victimization, have had great psychological impacts on women.

3.3- THE WOMAN AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL VICTIM

People's psychological profile is generally shaped by the experiences they have gone through. In *A Question Of Power* and *Beloved*, women's sufferings from racial segregation and gender objectification have slipped in the psychological field. In other words "sexism and racism are systems of societal and psychological restriction that have critically affected the lives of [women]" (Barbara Christian, 71).

Indeed, white and male rudeness has led women to end either murderous like Sethe or suicidal like Elizabeth. Sethe for instance, instead of letting her children return to Sweet Home and then live later the atrocities of slavery, has chosen to kill them one by one before killing herself. She kills her baby girl before being stopped and injures her two sons. There is a "sociopsychological conflict" in the background which results from the "contradictory cultural imperatives of European colonialism and African traditions" (Bell, 7). Sethe is the kind of woman who cannot "draw breath without [her] children", she wants to "take them all to the other side where [her] own ma'am is" (*Beloved*, 203). She is willing to "give up her life, every minute and hour of it to take back just one of Beloved's tears" (242).

Sethe has conserved some traits of her original traditional African culture which highly values motherhood. But the foundation of slavery is the denial of a human status to black people. In coming at 124, Schoolteacher is just taking back a "breeding nigger with her foal and three pickaninnies" (227). In fact, Schoolteacher compares her to a "horse" (149). Sethe is considered an animal as far the baby she is expecting is designated by a term used for animals: "foal". Thus, her reaction against white people is for Schoolteacher not out of motherlove but madness. The baby girl, who will come again eighteen years later,

is the actual characterization of Sethe's psychological torments. She embodies Sethe's "quest for social freedom and psychological wholeness" (Bell, 8).

Indeed, after the murder, when she returns from prison, part of the community has avoided her company and the other one has found her retiring within herself too proud and the attack against the baby misdirected. Thus, her deed pursues her, years later, and she has not yet been integrated into the community. Then, Sethe longs for pardon and self integration. So, Beloved has come in time because she acts as a:

Psychological catalyst for the three central (living) characters. The healing ritual in Beloved can be broken down into three stages. The first stage is the repression of memory that occurs from traumas of slavery; the second stage entails painful reconciliation with these memories; and the third is the « clearing » process, a symbolic rebirth of the sufferers (Harris, 397).

Memories are central in the novel. When Paul D and Sethe meet again, they recall life in Sweet Home before Schoolteacher at such a point that Denver asks: "how come anybody run off Sweet Home can't stop talking about it? Look like if it was so sweet you would have stayed" (13). In the same way, she clings to Sethe's memories about her own birth and the role Amy Denver has played in it because it is "all about herself" (77). But she loses patience whenever Sethe recalls events that occurred before or after her birth. In fact, all of them prefer to avoid dealing with the killing episode. They prefer to erase it from their story even if it is still present in their consciousness. Hence, Beloved is "an eruption of the past and the repressed unconscious" (Harris, 397).

Actually, Sethe wanted freedom for her "best Thing", but as far as one is dead and two gone, she denies herself the right to freedom. She feels guilty and refuses either to love or to be loved by anyone. So:

Through her attempts to lessen her guilt and difficult past, she ironically worsens it, and works her way into a psychological slavery much more terrifying than the physical slavery which she experienced at Sweet Home (Weisenberger, "Beloved-A Tree On Her Back", 5).

Truly enough, Beloved embodies Sethe's conscience because she needs to punish herself for having killed her daughter and revealed her "animal characteristic" as assessed by Schoolteacher. Furthermore, while Sethe is "trying to make up for the handsaw", Beloved is "making her pay for it" (251). Beloved accuses Sethe of "[having left] her behind. Of not being nice to her, not smiling at her". And, as far as she said "they were the same, had the same face, how could she have left her?" (241).

As a matter of fact, Sethe's conscience does not allow her at all to devote her attention to another one. Denver remarks that her mother is no more the strong and "queenly woman, the one who never looked away" she used to be, instead, she is all day long:

Whispering, muttering some justification, some bit of clarifying information to Beloved to explain what it was, what it had been like, and why, and how come. It is as though Sethe doesn't really want forgiveness given; she wants it refused. And Beloved helps her out (252).



Her difficulty when she has to confess her deed to Paul D, her circling the subject reveals her difficulty to forget the past. She feels deeply the need to explain and recall the murder to Beloved to free her consciousness, and convince her daughter that she was right.

So, when Paul D reappears, and that Sethe discharges herself of her "breasts" over Paul D, the baby ghost gets fiery. As far as the fight against Paul D is won by the latter, it comes in real form. However, Beloved's characterization has served as a dash between the characters' past and future. Only the reincarnation of Beloved helps Sethe to re-live her memories, straighten and exorcise her errors and forgive herself. Two main events have re-inserted Sethe in the community and relieved her by the same. First, the whole community, informed by Stamp Paid and led by Ella, has awakened to help her defeat the past's ghost. And then, more importantly, Sethe has at last understood that she had misused her fury. It was Schoolteacher who should be attacked but surely not her innocent babies.

In the same way, Denver as well has discovered her right place in society.

Up to eighteen, she is still "pushing out the front" of her mother's dress "provided she can get in it" (11). She only knows 124 and has had the awfulest difficulties to make her way through Lady Jones's house. She has turned physically into a full grown woman but still acts girlish because she does not know the difference because of her isolation. She has "stepped out of the door" and "asked for help" because she has "some sense after all" (256). It is Sethe's psychological victimization which has led her to set out and seek help; introducing herself in society and further, womanhood. She has not had broad contacts with the community. Though a baby girl when the murder occurred, she is submitted to psychological victimization as its consequences. She is as innocent as Baby Suggs but both have suffered from slavery's aftermath psychologically.

Unlike Sethe, Elizabeth's psychological victimhood is not caused by a reaction she has had in her past but instead, inner torments she experiences night and day. Her psychological stability is first shattered when, as a young girl, she is announced her mother's insanity. The nervous shock she has will last long in her life. She has deeply suffered in South Africa because of having "been rigidly classified coloured. There was no escape from it to the simple joy of being a human being with personality" (*A Question Of Power*, 44). It is the reason why Medusa keeps on hurling at her: "you are too funny for words. You have to die".

On insisting constantly on her colour, she not only victimizes Elizabeth on the racial level but psychologically because she denies her self-definition and persecutes her as a nonentity. Hence, it results in her lack of self-confidence which leads her to find herself ugly as far as she does not look like the racial standard of beauty of either white or black community: "I'm not saying I'm not ugly. I shouldn't mind if anyone told I'm ugly because I know it's true" (43).

However, Elizabeth's mental instability which already affected her in South Africa, is to be really deepened in Botswana where "mentally, the normal and the abnormal [blend] completely in her mind" (15). She has fled apartheid South

Africa to seek solace in an African community for self-respect and equality. But she notices that the "evils overwhelming her" in Botswana are beginning to "sound like South Africa from which she [has] fled"; she finds similarities in "reasoning, viciousness" except that this time, the "faces [are] black" and it is "local people" (57).

Elizabeth's inner turmoils are due to two men: Sello and Dan, each of them using other characters as instruments of oppression against her. But she confesses that she knows too few things about Sello, the living man, and all she knows is by hearsay. Sello uses Medusa to victimize Elizabeth. But for Elizabeth, Medusa is "unlike any other woman [she's] ever seen" before, she is "haughty, arrogant...and so real" that Elizabeth lives in "terror of her" all her days (58). Medusa keeps on reminding Elizabeth of her racial and sexual inferiority as a coloured to weaken her mentally. She parades a superior smile which Elizabeth had already seen in the white lynching mob of the picture. She "creates evil and reveals" in it, "wherever relentless cruelty and hatred" erupt, it is "like the geyser of Medusa's soul erupting". Thus Medusa is deeply rooted in evil. She is all about evil. For a whole year, she is "unreasonably tortured...by unprovoked assaults" by Medusa (139). Elizabeth has even understood that "Sello isn't Satan" but it is the "woman who [is] evil" (139).

So when Medusa disappears, Elizabeth feels released and for a whole week, she recovers her mental health because her nights are no more haunted by hellish visions. Unfortunately, it does not last long because Medusa disappears to let the place of the persecutor to Dan who surely "will kill her" (92).

Dan's victimizing of Elizabeth is more sadistic. He first shows her the ideal love and exquisite feelings they should live together and unexpectedly turns into: "the extension of Medusa, and the torrent of hatred he [feels] for Elizabeth [hits] her daily such terrible blows, she [is] barely alive. It [is] done under cover of the parade of the nice-time girls" (169). He has first gained her confidence to better

overwhelm her psychological defence. He accuses her relations of the most evil deeds to completely isolate her: Tom is qualified an homosexual, whereas Mrs Jones is said to be "the origin of his nice- time girls" (171).

He keeps her awake a whole year. Her nights are haunted by Dan and his prowess with his endless list of mistresses for he praises himself to be "the king of the sex". He declares to Elizabeth triumphantly: "I go and go with them all. They've been specially created for my desires.... But need you try? You have nothing. I've shown you all they have, but you have nothing" (168). He plays on Elizabeth's weak sexual stamina but complains "my darling, I have all these women, but I don't love them. If I lose you I have nothing else" (168).

In fact, Dan's interest is not so much on Elizabeth herself but her godly nature. He longs for her good values because she, with Sello, represents the last barrier for Dan toward the victory of evil against good. To defeat her psychologically, he makes her live "in a world where no one [loves] anyone. They [are] just barking savagely all the time; they [are] not human, or anything but permanently growing, hideous, savage beasts" (168).

Dan makes her live in a mental breakdown after mental breakdown. Actually, Elizabeth is involved in a fight where she is nothing but an instrument each antagonist uses for his advantage. Indeed, her victimhood and consequent nervous breakdown results from Dan and Sello's confrontation. They perceive in her a means to overcome each other's power. Thus the day she breaks, she simply "[howls] , and like a volcano the evil [erupts] in a wild flow of molten lava" (171).

Elizabeth complains of hell's ever lasting presence "I go to the loony bin. There's hell. I come back. There's hell. Where does it all end?" (186). She is everywhere persecuted and Dan gives her the final solution: "you are going to end it, you are going to commit suicide". Not only does Elizabeth have means to do it because she kept the drug in the psychiatric hospital for such a case, but also she

feels depressed enough to do it. She is saved by Tom's return in time first and then by Sello's statement to her: "Elizabeth, love isn't like that. Love is two people mutually feeding each other, not one living on the soul of the other like a ghoul!" (197). Like a magic formula, it makes the "storm" and the "pain" in her head "subside". The comparison between Dan who is "going with B the Womb on her bed" and an "Afrikaner Boers in South Africa...caught contravening the Immorality Act" is significant enough (198).

Elizabeth's double rejection first in South Africa and then in Botswana has made her long for love as much as Sethe has longed for Beloved's pardon. Elizabeth has internalized deep in her conscience her racial inferiority and most of her sufferings derive from that. In addition, her victimization by Medusa conveys women's perceptions of their image created by men. Indeed, like in ancient mythology, Medusa characterizes female devilish nature. But love's importance is conveyed by Elizabeth's being saved by her friends and son's loving attention. But if she owes safety to love, Sethe's sorrows instead are caused by strong and exclusive love for her children. After her baby's killing, she retreats in her self and refuses to forget. She has suffered psychologically as an immediate result of racial and gender victimhood. But her healing is the result of the community's help set by her daughter Denver, her friend Ella and her lover Paul D. Thus Morrison and Head have shown that when one is victimized by the system or other people, one needs the help and love of one's community to survive.

CONCLUSION

In *Transcript of an Interview with Time Magazine*, Morrison reveals that she has uncovered in *Beloved* her interest "in the way in which the past affects the present" because she finds that "if we understand a good deal more about history, we automatically understand a great more about contemporary life" (1). She has dealt with a three-centuries old story to reconstruct black history and refresh our memories about the most dreadful experience of black people, especially women.

Through her writing, Morrison has shown the woman's triple oppression. Indeed, both black men and black women suffer from racial prejudice but black women undergo sexist victimization which could be explained also as a psychological oppression.

This multidimensional victimhood of women has mostly made out their being deeply marked by slavery. Sethe for instance is physically marked by slavery and its abuses and feels it as a chockeerry tree with "trunk, branches, and even leaves" (*Beloved*,16) even though Paul D has just seen a "revolting clump of scars" (21) looking like a "decorative work of an ironsmith too passionate for display" (17). But such an imagery is not hazardous because in popular beliefs, trees have always symbolized people's sufferings. So, Sethe will always bear her mark because she is the carrier of black people's sufferings. And what she carries is not simply a tree but the inheritance of slavery which she is to perpetually remember along with the whole community. And even the way *Beloved* is removed from the scene is not definite and clear, it suggests that Blacks will always live with their memories and there is no way to forget.

Actually, white male racist and sexist dominations have seriously undermined black women's psychology. The psychological dimension of female victimhood is precisely so much important that critics have seen in *Beloved*, the characterization of of Sethe's identity for she behaves the way Sethe's

consciousness would like things to be.

Similarly, psychology has played an important role in the development of Head's *A Question Of Power*. Elizabeth's persecution during the three years "[reduces] her to a wreck" (47). She is first pursued by Sello's wife, Medusa the "wild-eyed" woman, who constantly reminds her about her racial difference and hurls at her "die, die, die" (45). In fact, Medusa may be interpreted as a masculine voice, in other words, a horrifying image of womanhood as an inferior and satanic status. Men have created images of women to destroy both their female and male counterparts. Medusa is an archetype from the various images of women in the classical canon. According to Davies, Cixous interprets the images of the Medusa and the witch in *The Laugh of the Medusa* as "two constructions...who respond overtly to patriarchal dominance" (*Black Women Writing*, 77).

Then, Head's using Medusa's image is to undermine the myth and the demonization of women. Elizabeth does not feel herself until Medusa is removed from the plot. In fact, Head's use of Medusa may be explained by the fact that she believes it "necessary for [her] to concentrate directly on people because [she] believe[s] it is only people who make other people suffer and not some hidden, unknown God or devil" (MacKenzie, 63). She has seen all her "living experience as the knowledge evil, knowledge of its sources, of its true face and the misery and sufferings it inflicts on human life (63). Nevertheless, she would later see the most visible incarnation of evil in Dan.

Her persecution reaches its peak when Dan arrives. He has to make the journey to Hell with both Elizabeth and Sello but his only thought is to get rid of them, appropriate their power and make evil gain and rule the world. He lets her first feel what love she should have lived with him to better "kill" her after. He shows off his sexual aptitudes with any woman but her because she is an "outsider". But his hatred is also directed toward Sello.

Actually, they both use Elizabeth just to reach the other's position. Their antagonism results in Elizabeth's victimization and insanity because they submit her to worst tortures. The two men's derision has led her to break nervously. According to Head, a "psychiatrist" may find the text a "description of a wretched form of schizophrenia which is very distressing" and which "throws light on the world of insanity about which not much is known", but she, herself has just told the truth about men and women's relations in African societies (Eilersen, 252).

Elizabeth's victimization in the racial level by both white and black communities and her persecution by the two men Sello and Dan, result in physical weakness and insanity but once she regains strength and destroys the embodiment of evil, Dan, she is convinced that with Sello, they have "maybe...introduced a softness into mankind's history" (202). Her rejection because of factors for which she does not feel responsible ie gender, race, has resulted in her believing not in God but in mankind and love. The "essential nature" of her love with Sello is its including "all mankind" and its equalizing "all things and men" (202). Elizabeth's exclusion and sufferings make her value so much love, and because she has longed for it all her life, it explains the importance it has in her recovering.

In fact, both authors have illustrated womanist traits in their writings. Indeed, in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, once Paul D knows about Sethe's mentally and physically weakened health, he hurries to help her. He reveals to her for the first time that she, Sethe, is her "best thing". Her incredulous repetition of "Me? Me?" (273) predicates a total and definite forgetfulness of the past. He makes her think first as a fully free individual then as a mother and not the reverse.

Thus, in characterizing Sethe's rescue through Paul D, Morrison has once more shown the importance of man in African American womanist landscape. Obviously, the black man cannot be ignored in female literature because, he shares with women the racial oppression in a white racialized society.

Similarly, Sello's reversal is significant enough. It shows us that even though African females suffer a lot from sexist ways, they can not part from them in life. Elizabeth recovers thanks to Tom's friendly ways and Shorty's presence. Then, motherhood has an important place in black woman's prose. All Sethe's sorrows result from her being a mother first but she is saved by her daughter's concern. Of course, Denver is helped by the community of women. They provide food for the Suggs' family but also exorcise the baby ghost. Actually, black women kinship is as much present in *Beloved* as in *A Question Of Power*. Elizabeth, indeed owes her sanity to Kenosi and "the normal, the human, the friendly soft kind glow about the eyes" she has not "seen for a long time" and which she rediscovers in Mrs Jones's face (Head, 196).

Hence, the result of a long and deep victimization not only by racist systems but also sexist segregation has been for black female authors such as Toni Morrison and Bessie Head to refuse the Western feminist label alongside black male sexist claims. They have preferred to re-write the black story from a female perspective first and then, more and more, they are setting plans for the improvement of black woman's role in the black people's future in general.

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GUIDE D'ENTRETIEN CHERCHEURS ET AGENTS DE DEVELOPPEMENT

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