

IN THE NAME OF GOD

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POSTMODERN BLACKNESS IN TONI
MORRISON'S *BELOVED*

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*To Members of My Family,
Friends of My Mind*

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چکیده

الف. موضوع و طرح مسئله (اهمیت موضوع و هدف):
در پایان نامه حاضر دو دیدگاه معاصر نقد ادبی (پسا مدرنیسم و پسا استعماری) مورد بررسی قرار گرفته اند. چهار مفهوم اصلی و مشترک در این دو دیدگاه مورد تحلیل قرار گرفته اند. هدف از انجام این تحقیق نشان دادن دامنه گسترده مفاهیم نقد ادبی معاصر به ویژه در خصوص دو دیدگاه پسا مدرنیسم و پسا استعماری می باشد. همچنین این مفاهیم مشترک بر روی محبوب تونی موریسون به کار برده شده اند و این اثر به عنوان یک اثر پست مدرن سیاه ارائه گردیده است. به این طریق ادبیات آفریقایی-آمریکایی که نسبت به ادبیات سفید پوستان در حاشیه قرار گرفته بود در سایه مفاهیم و نظریات موجود در پسا مدرنیسم و پسا استعماری در مقام ادبیات هم سطح و هم ارزش با ادبیات سفید پوستان قرار گرفت.

ب. مبانی نظری شامل مرور مختصری از منابع، چارچوب نظری و پرسشها و فرضیه ها:
تحقیق حاضر شامل سه فصل اصلی می باشد. فصل اول مرور مختصری بر پسا مدرنیسم است و سپس مفاهیم شخص بودگی، تاریخ، رئالیسم جادویی، و حاشیه گرایی در چارچوب دیدگاه پسا مدرنیسم مورد بررسی قرار می گردند. فصل دوم پس از ارائه مقدمه ای بر پسا استعمار، به بررسی مفاهیم مشابه در این دیدگاه می پردازد. در فصل سوم به این فرضیه که مفاهیم یاد شده در پسا مدرنیسم و پسا استعمار دارای وجوه اشتراک هستند، بحث می گردد. همچنین ادبیات آفریقایی-آمریکایی نیز به عنوان زیر شاخه ای از ادبیات پسا استعمار در نظر گرفته می شود که برخی از خصوصیات پسا مدرنیسم را در بر می گیرد. در انتها این مفاهیم بر روی محبوب به کار برده شده است.

پ. مبانی نظری شامل مرور مختصری از منابع، روش تحقیق، نمونه گیری و روشهای نمونه گیری ابزار اندازه گیری، نحوه اجرای آن، شیوه گردآوری و تجزیه و تحلیل داده ها:
مفاهیم اصلی مورد بحث در دو دیدگاه پسا مدرنیسم و پسا استعمار شامل شخص بودگی، تاریخ، رئالیسم جادویی، و حاشیه گرایی می باشد. شخص بودگی به این معنا است که هر فرد در جامعه پسا مدرن و پسا استعمار یک سوژه است و شخصیتی بر ساخته دارد، به عنوان دیگر فردیت و هویت بر ساخته از عوامل خارجی تاثیر گذار بر فرد است. تاریخ نیز امری بر ساخته است که به ظاهر مجموعه ای از حقایق گذشته را به صورت عینی و علمی باز نمایی می نماید و بطور کامل واقع گرا است. لیکن در قالب این دو دیدگاه به این مسئله پرداخته می شود که تاریخ بر اساس قدرت و ایدئولوژی حاکم بر هر دوره نقل می گردد، لذا به تغییر، تحریف و حذف برخی از وقایع و باز سازی آنان می پردازد. رئالیسم جادویی نیز به کاربرد تکنیکی در ادبیات اطلاق می شود که در آن از عوامل فراطبیعی استفاده می گردد، لیکن با وجود عامل رئالیسم که در شیوه روایتی این تکنیک به کار می رود، این عامل فراطبیعی کاملاً طبیعی و امری واقعی جلوه می نماید. حاشیه گرایی به این مفهوم است که ایدئولوژی حاکم هر جامعه گروهی را در حاشیه قرار می دهد تا قدرت خود را حفظ نماید. روش تحقیق شامل مفاهیم ذکر شده در قالب پسا مدرنیسم و پسا استعمار می باشد. پس از تحلیل آنها محبوب در همین قالب بررسی می شود و به عنوان یک اثر پست مدرن سیاه ارائه میشود.

ت. یافته های تحقیق:

در تحقیق حاضر چهار مفهوم شخص بودگی، تاریخ، رئالیسم جادویی، و حاشیه گرایی در دیدگاه پسا مدرنیسم و پسا استعمار تحلیل شده اند. اثر محبوب نیز در قالب هر دو دیدگاه بررسی و نقد گردیده

است و در خاتمه یک اثر پست مدرن سیاه نامیده شده است ، که شامل مفاهیم مشترک بین دو دیدگاه مذکور می باشد.

ث. نتیجه گیری و پیشنهادات:

نتیجه این تحقیق مشترک بودن مفاهیم شخص بودگی، تاریخ، رئالیسم جادویی، و حاشیه گرایی در دو دیدگاه نقد ادبی پسا مدرنیسم و پسا استعمار می باشد. همچنین بررسی شده است که برخی از مفاهیم پست مدرن را می توان در ادبیات آفریقایی-آمریکایی ردیابی نمود. از جمله محبوب تونی موریسون که از این امر مستثنی نیست. ادبیات آفریقایی-آمریکایی که مدتها در حاشیه قرار گرفته است جای نقد و بررسی از دیگر دیدگاههای نقد ادبی را نیز دارا می باشد.

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I. Introduction

While studying *The Empire Writes Back* (Ashcroft et al.), I became acquainted with the postcolonial theory, and as I studied more on this subject, I discovered that Postcolonialism as a contemporary theory shares many characteristics with other theories such as Marxism, feminism, and postmodernism.

Being familiar with some key concepts of postmodernism and reading Linda Hutcheon's brilliant article "Circling the Downspout of Empire", in which she discusses briefly some shred features of postmodernism and postcolonialism, I came to a decision to explore the concepts where these two significant theories converge.

Later, bell hooks' (Gloria Watkins) striking essay, "Postmodern Blackness" motivated me to pursue the nexus where postmodernism and postcolonialism intersect, in an African-American writer, since as she points out,

Postmodernism calls attention to those shared sensibilities which cross boundaries of class, gender, race, etc. The overall impact of Postmodernism is that many other groups now share with black folk a sense of deep alienation, despair, uncertainty, loss of grounding even it is not informed by shared circumstances. (1309-10)

As I was familiar with Toni Morrison, the first African-American writer to win the Noble Prize for Literature, I decided to work on her acclaimed novel *Beloved* (1984).

Toni Morrison was born Chloe Anthony Wofford in Lorain, Ohio, on February 18, 1931, the second of four children of George Wofford. After attending Lorain High School, she went to Howard University, where she earned a B.A. in 1953, with a major in English and a minor in classics. After earning an M.A. at Cornell in 1955, Morrison

taught for two years at Texas Southern University, then in 1957 returned to Howard, where she became an instructor of English and married Harold Morrison, a Jamaican architect. In 1964 she divorced Morrison and returned with her two sons to Lorain; a year and a half later she became an editor for a textbook at Random House in Syracuse. By 1970 she had moved to an editorial position at Random House in New York, where she eventually became senior editor. In this capacity she anonymously edited *The Black Book* (1974), a collection of documents related to the history of black Americans. Morrison has taught black American literature and creative writing at two branches of the State University of New York (Purchase and Albany), as well as at Yale University, Bard College, and Trinity College, Cambridge. She is currently Robert F. Goheen Professor in the Council of the Humanities at Princeton University.

Toni Morrison began to write when she returned to Howard in 1957, and since then she has published several novels in which the problems of black people in the Midwest are a major theme. Her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), depicts the lives of several young women, one of whom, Pecola, comes to believe that blue eyes are a symbol of whiteness and, therefore, of superiority. *Sula* (1973), set in the mythical town of Medallion, Ohio, addresses issues of both racial and gender equality in its portrayal of the contrasting lives of two young women, one of whom accepts the traditions, and the other one, Sula, attempts to achieve freedom by breaking the traditions. Morrison's third novel, *Song of Solomon* (1977), is a rich trace of history in a black family over nearly a century; it was both a popular and critical success, winning the National Book Critics Circle Award and the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters Award. *Tar Baby* (1981), set on an imaginary Caribbean island, was less well received. But with her

fifth novel, *Beloved* (1987), Morrison came to be recognized as perhaps the leading black American writer of her generation. This novel not only achieved best-seller status but won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. *Jazz* (1992) is a depiction of the lives of black Americans in a mythical "City" in the 1920s. Morrison's seventh novel, *Paradise* (1998), breaks new ground because it does not focus on a single protagonist but develops a conflict between two opposed groups of people. The central event in the novel is an attack by nine leading citizens on a group of women who live at the Convent. During that assault two of the women, one white and one black, are shot to death, but the remaining three black women, one of them clutching a newborn baby, manages to escape. And the theme of racial discrimination and the life stories of the women at the convent are explored. Her mostly recent work is *Love* (2003), (Peach 2-11; Kubitscheck 1-25; Adell 5-29)

Morrison indicates a writer whose works can be viewed from the two perspectives of postcolonialism and postmodernism. Since as an African-American who sees herself as a writer with a racial and cultural identity, she explores postcolonial themes, and as a contemporary writer who simultaneously can contribute to the traditions of contemporary American literature, some of her works depict postmodern features. Her importance lies in the fact that she gives voice to those who have been silenced by imperialism and colonial discourse. In my opinion, she is a postmodern writer due to the fact that not only some of her novels, including *Beloved*, *Jazz* and *Paradise*, explore experimental postmodern techniques, but also she subverts many dominant ideological structures, acting out to put the marginalized discourses at center and central discourses at margin. Given the recurring concern in her work with the search for an identity, which is liberated

from the central politics that subject an identity to different social discourses, she attests to invent some characters that have the capacity to see beyond the politics of center, and some other characters that are doomed to suffer a fragmented, and lost identity. As an African-American writer, in her novels she tries to draw on folklore and myth which have not been given sufficient attention by critics who use Euro-American standards to evaluate a literary work. Moreover, according to Peach, the circular movements in her novels transform past incidents and add "new layers of meaning, resolving, at the level of narrative structure, the novel's thematic opposition between past and present" (22). As a result it makes her as a historian who attests to restore black narratives of history; therefore, many of her works are deeply and obviously historical. In her works the so called textuality of history is revealed, and a process is undertaken to incorporate a new black history into the privileged one which has excluded African-American past. Some postmodern features are available in her novel such as, "The fusion of history, realism, and verifiable fact with story telling, fantasy, and folklore in her work, the blurring of the boundaries between them" (Peach 27).

Her works also share concerns with many postcolonial works too. The black individuals in her works are inevitably perceived as being subjected to an ideological discourse of racism, that define them as an object, less human, less moral, and biologically inferior. Moreover she tries to fill the gaps in the colonial historical discourse; providing new historical narratives for the blacks. She also draws on black folklores and myths, rooted in West African tradition, in order to connect the black people to their roots. The most important point about her is that in her works, the Other is

allowed to speak, and express all the things that have been excluded or ignored by the white people.

Among different novels of Morrison, I chose *Beloved* since in this novel Morrison overtly concentrates on black experience of racism, which classifies this work as a postcolonial fiction, and also this novel explicitly manifest some features of postmodernism that will be expanded throughout the present thesis.

As a contemporary and proliferating theory which, according to some critics such as Aijaz Ahmed, has developed since the 1970s, postcolonialism is a theory which is worth pursuing. Moreover; it appears to me that a few theses in this respect have been undertaken in Iran, which does not seem to be adequate, especially due to the fact that postcolonial discussion tends to be expanding in its scope.

Although in Iran many studies have been done and still are being done in relation to postmodernism, as far as I know no sufficient attention is paid to its interdisciplinary nature. I also believe that confusion is sometimes created by the overlapping between postmodernism and postcolonialism. Confusions about whether the prefix post- in postcolonialism is the same as post- in postmodernism; whether Other and difference, which are partially focused in postmodernism, are the same as Other and politics of difference in postcolonialism; in what ways decolonization might converge with deconstruction; how the politics of postcolonialism can contribute to postmodernism; and finally what features these two approaches share. So the resolving of this confusion is a significant point, and worth considering.

How we approach the work of an African-American author has become an important issue in literary criticism. As an African-American writer, Toni Morrison's

works have their origin in an interaction between European and African cultures. The significance of this study lies in the fact that it aims at studying this work in light of postcolonialism. *Beloved* is also mostly explored through Postcolonial and Feminist theories, while I claim taking into consideration the points where postcolonialism and postmodernism overlap would distinguish this work as a postmodern black novel.

In this thesis, an attempt is first made to introduce the interdisciplinary nature of postmodernism and postcolonialism as important recent developments. As Linda Hutcheon points out, the influential cooperation between these two theories leads to a convergence on different levels of thematic, formal and discursive strategies ("Circling the Downspout" 131). My focus, then, is only on two levels; thematic and formal, which include history, marginality and subjectivity on the thematic level and magical realism on the formal level. What follows is an analysis of these notions in the light of postmodernism and specifically postcolonialism.

Chapter one provides a context for discussing the concepts of subjectivity, history, magical realism, and marginality in the light of postmodernism. I will start by giving a general definition of postmodernism and discussing the major critics in this field. Then I will discuss that postmodernism questions the ideas of coherent and autonomous identity, i.e. it views identity to be fragmented and subjected to various historical and social discourses. I will start by the definition of subjectivity and the ways it is different from seemingly synonymous words, such as individuality and identity. A historical survey of the term is explored that traces subjectivity from Cartesian ideas of an autonomous subject to the present time. Later the ideas of Linda Hutcheon, Hayden White, and Michel Foucault on topics such as the fictionality of history, the blurring of

past and present, the question of historical and chronological narration as discursive formations will be discussed. My focus on this issue would be on Hutcheon's theory of historiographic metafiction in which history is viewed as story, constructed through especial discourses of each era. The tendency for magical realism as a technique, which "challenges...conventions of realism" (ibid) in favor of fantasy, and the affinity between postmodernist fiction and fantastic genre will be explored then. According to McHale, magical realism as a formal technique provides the possibility of the incorporation of other ontological worlds. Thus, this technique offers postmodern literary works to contest the idea of fixed, rigid truth and reality, as well as the dominant history. As such, different realities and histories that have been excluded by the dominant authority would find a chance to be incorporated into the postmodern literary works. There will be also an elaboration on the notion of marginality, a challenging of centrality and rejection of privileged in postmodernism. One of the focuses of postmodernism, as Linda Hutcheon points out is that it opens up a space to allow the ex-centric or the marginalized to speak. So in postmodern literary works, it is the marginalized that speaks and contests the so called authoritative assumptions of the society.

Chapter two sketches the same concepts in relationship to postcolonialism. In this chapter, I make an attempt to give a brief introduction to postcolonialism, discussing its major concerns, and defining colonialism and imperialism. Subjectivity in the light of postcolonialism will be the first issue to be analyzed, according to which the imperial discourse imposes subjecthood upon the ethnics, which must be internalized by them. This subjecthood defines the blacks and other colonized people as Other, an object and inferior to the colonizer. Through establishing a constructed structure of binary

oppositions and stereotypes, the colonizer fills the colonized with a sense of self-contempt and physical degradation. The colonized, thus attempts to achieve the colonizer's status, yet as Homi Bhabha points out, due to the dominant colonial discourse, it can not be achieved. Consequently the distortion of self that is created by the white norms will develop a sense of fracture, and self-hatred in the black people. Finally I will discuss the ways that the colonized people develop a self. Postcolonial theory also allows a close scrutiny of history, since ideological forces and imperialism as a means of controlling the colonized societies construct a history that functions as a means of legacy. The colonial discourse deprive the colonized of possessing any history, depicting their past as blank. Moreover, some certain stereotypes of the colonized are developed throughout the central history that justify the politics of colonialism. So the task of postcolonialism is to develop a conscious history that either rejects the dominant historical narration or incorporates their marginalized narration into the central history. Thus, a fixed past is questioned and hybrid histories appear. Magical realism will be defined as a decolonizing agent with the great potential of resistance to colonizer's ideology and the product of the colonized imagination, which contributes to a cultural survival. The dual narrative structure of magical realism, creates a political mode, colonialism and its narration of objective reality and history are included in realistic structure, while the postcolonial issues exist in the magical narration. Thus a hybrid space is created that can both represent the colonizer and the colonized perspectives. The key postcolonial notions such as histories, realities and oral tradition of the Other, could be expressed through this technique. As such the monolithic authority of the colonized is challenged. Marginality is also one of the key concepts in postcolonial studies, in which a

condition is constructed by the imperial authority that posits the colonized societies as Other to the privileged center. In this part the binary opposition of center and margin would be discussed, and the flimsy nature of it would be argued. Deconstructing and subverting this center is crucial to postcolonialism, and it would be discussed that the major techniques used for decolonizing are transculturation and hybridity, in which a space is offered for the expression and exchange of different cultures and people. Through transculturation, the marginalized and ex-centric can speak.

Chapter three would be an analysis of the novel in view of the same concepts with emphasis on the overlapping of these notions in postmodernism and postcolonialism. First some shared issues between postmodernism and postcolonialism are discussed. Later, there will be an elaboration on postmodern blackness. As bell hooks notes, postmodernism can provide black writers with political paradigms of decolonization. She claims that postmodernism has been within the white American or European domain, while there exist some shared issues in postmodernism and African-American studies. Considering subjectivity, the major characters including Sethe, Paul D, and Baby Suggs undergo a life of silence and denied selfhood which is based on white definitions of blackness; they have internalized the imperial discourse and live within this discourse. Hence they are plagued with a sense of being fragmented, decentered and Other. Yet as the story develops, with the appearance of Beloved, the characters start to decolonize the imposed subjecthood, and recover the voice they have been deprived of. Regarding history one must refer to what Davis argues, "Morrison accepts the poststructuralist critique of the idea of a single totalizing truth or history" (3) in *Beloved* Morrison undertakes the role of a creative historian, who works to deconstruct master

narratives of official history. In the novel, history is treated as story, discursively formulated. Therefore, the novel recreates and rediscovers an American history, which is based on the brutal fact of slavery; personal stories and narrativization of the major characters incorporate the fact of slavery into the central history. Regarding history as a story also posits *Beloved* as a historiographic metafiction that fictionalizes history through the imagination of a writer. As Peach argues the definition offered by Isabel Allene on magical realism suggests some features of Toni Morrison's novels:

Magic Realism really means allowing a place in literature to the invisible forces that have such a powerful place in life...dreams, myth, legend, passion, obsession, superstition, religion, the overwhelming power of nature and supernatural, all present in African poetry and fiction. (Allene, qtd. in Peach 12)

So *Beloved* is a work of magical realism taking into consideration the fact that the elements of ghost stories, such as the reappearance of Beloved, black folklores and superstitions recur in it. In this sense magical realism offers Morrison to present a dual narrative structure, with a hybrid perspective of both the colonizer and the colonized. Similar to many other postcolonial fictions, marginality is a key issue in *Beloved*. All characters of the novel suffer a sense of marginality and silence, which are imposed upon them by the white authorities. And they all seek to subvert and deconstruct the foundations that have marginalized African-Americans. In this part I would discuss how the unspoken of the marginalized blacks are spoken, and how the major characters subvert the present/absent opposition through making themselves powerfully present throughout the novel.

The conclusion would be a general overview of the thesis. I will also mention that despite Morrison's reluctance to relate her work to postmodernism, Morrison had produced the kind of work that shares some features of postmodernism. Her reluctance is mainly due to the fact that she tends her works to be fundamentally African-American; in this sense she has an essentialist view. Bouson contends "strategic essentialism becomes an almost indispensable tool for a writer like Morrison who wants to speak to and about a people whose individual lives may be markedly different, but who nonetheless suffer from a common form of racial hegemony" (222); however, some critics, such as Peach, Pérez-Torrés and Kubitschek, contend that some of her contemporary works depict especial features of postmodernism. Gysin also notes that any African-American novel that portrays features like "undercutting truth and ideology...blending of the levels of fictionality and reality...fragmented characters who look at events through different focalizing lenses arranged one behind the other" (139) is a work of postmodern. As a result *Beloved* can be considered as a postmodern black novel.

Chapter One