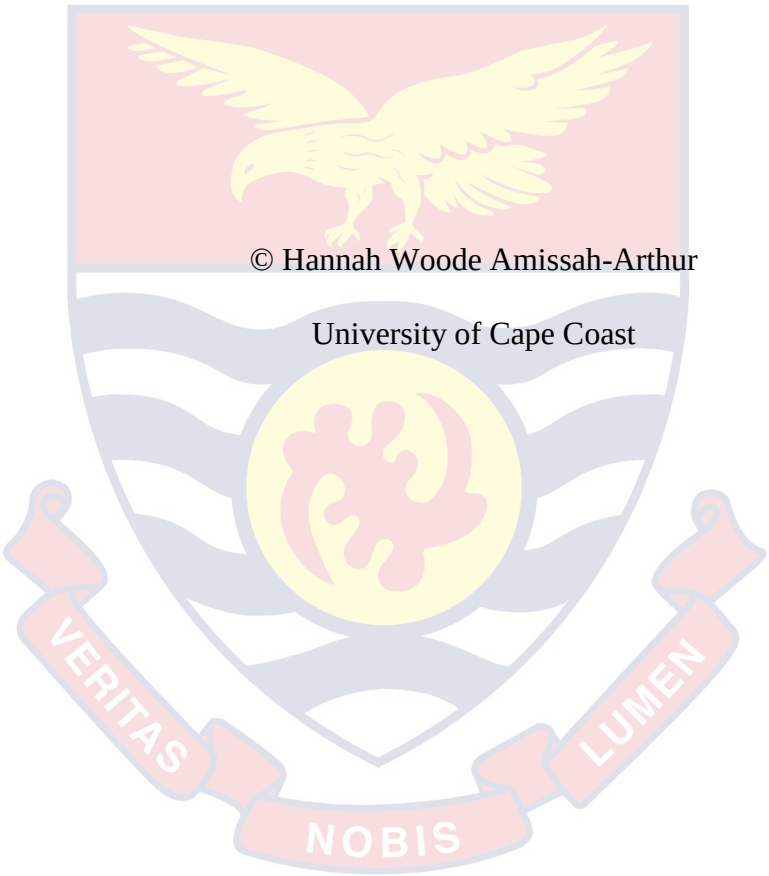
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

THEORIZING MOTHERING: A READING OF SELECTED AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN'S TEXTS

HANNAH WOODE AMISSAH-ARTHUR

2021



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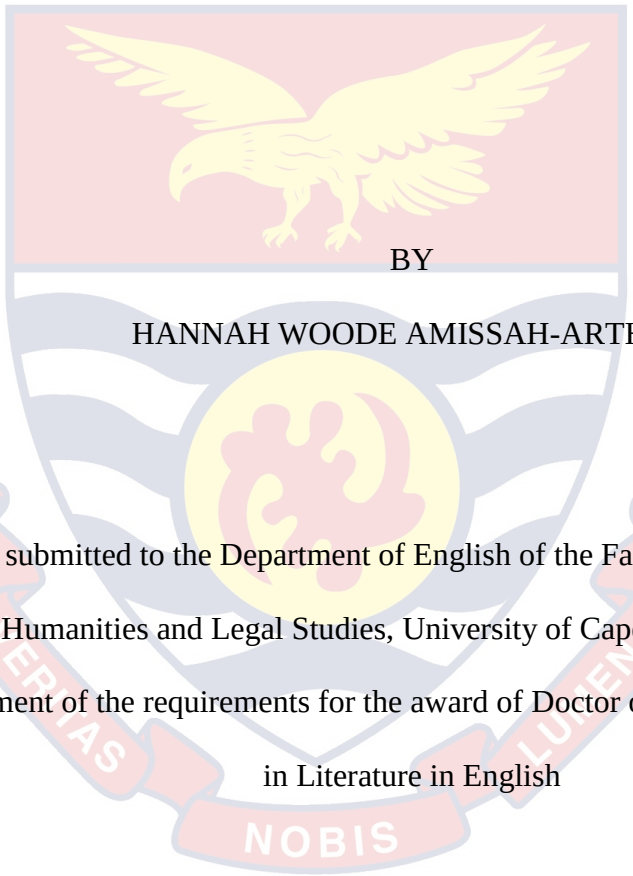

BY

HANNAH WOODE AMISSAH-ARTHUR

Thesis submitted to the Department of English of the Faculty of Arts, College of Humanities and Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy Degree in Literature in English

MARCH 2021

DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere.

Candidate's Signature……. Date……

Name: Hannah Woode Amissah-Arthur

Supervisors' Declaration

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Principal Supervisor's Signature…… Date…….

Name: Professor Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang

Co-Supervisor's Signature…… Date…….

Name: Dr. Theresah Addai-Mununkum

ABSTRACT

This research explores the interconnectivity amongst Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859), Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) as they explore the indomitable nature of the maternal inclination which cuts across boundaries and time in African-American history. This exploration is a fraction of the discourses by African-American women in their attempt to portray black women who defy all odds in order to maintain their status as mothers. Most literature assumes motherhood as being interchangeable with mothering. However, African-American feminists assert that mothering is more empowering and without patriarchal influence for the woman than motherhood. This research focuses on the attempt by African-American women writers in narrating the mothering experiences of black women during slavery, flight and freedom. Employing psychoanalytic feminism and critical race theory, I attempt to trace the mothering nature of black women characters in the four novels to ascertain how the events in their lives represented or misrepresented their mothering disposition and how this influenced their families and their individuality. I conclude that 'mothering and 'motherhood' have various implications through the use of tropes such as imagery, characterisation, amongst others, for African-American women. Secondly, there exist a representation and misrepresentation in the mothering disposition of black women characters, and most importantly, this study attempts to provide a new terminology 'motherhate'.

KEY WORDS

Black

Feminism

Race

Slavery

Mothering

Motherhood

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DEDICATION

Aiboe Kobina, my father who othermothered me;

Kwabena Ampem Darko, my perfect love;

Ewurabena, Ewuradwoa and Kwasi, you make mothering worth it.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This chapter presents the inception of this research. It discusses the background to the study, the thesis statement, and research questions underpinning the work, theoretical framework, the scope, significance as well as the organisation of this study.

Background to the Study

The institution of motherhood and the practice of mothering have undergone several redefinitions by various scholars and theoreticians. Adrienne Rich's *of Woman Born* literally opened the debate on the two similar concepts used interchangeably by some scholars: 'motherhood' and 'mothering'. In her book, the idea of motherhood is more unique in its complexity than in its terminology. Thus, she elaborates, "we know more about the air we breathe, the seas we travel, than about the nature and meaning of motherhood" (2004). Her idea of motherhood is broad as it covers the period from the onset of pregnancy through childbirth and beyond. She is of the view that unlike fatherhood or the term "to father", which basically entails providing a sperm to fertilize the ovum, "to mother", spans a long continuum which takes years. Therefore, to her, "motherhood is earned, first through an intense physical and psychic rite of passage-pregnancy and childbirth - then through learning to nurture, which doesn't come by instinct" (p.12). Rich's definitions of motherhood and fatherhood can be contested in many instances as I am of the view that motherhood does not necessarily begin with pregnancy as some women become mothers through nurturing only and not

through the rite of passage, as presented. Fatherhood, as well, in my opinion, goes beyond merely providing a sperm to fertilize an ovum. Some fathers perform other roles in the lives of their children. These include nurturing, providing food and accommodation as well as protecting their children. Thus, it becomes possible to see motherhood and fatherhood as context specific. Rich defines motherhood in two ways, with one superimposed on the other. The first definition being "the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children" and the second, "the institution which aims at ensuring that potential and all women shall remain under male control" (p.13). These definitions distinguish the concept of motherhood as characterised by patriarchal influence in the first definition and without patriarchal influence in the second definition. O'Reilly (2004), in her work, buttresses Rich's stance, and views motherhood as an institution as well as a form of defined site of oppression by males. She claims that the experiences of women in mothering are a source of power. Green (2004) also asserts that feminist mothers are of the view that patriarchy is embedded in motherhood. Thus, feminists acknowledge the restrictive and oppressive nature of the institution which points towards the notion of an "ideal" motherhood that is characterised by certain stereotypical traits and characterisations (p.127). These stereotypical traits and characterisations include the conventional ideals of the society that motherhood should be the sole responsibility of the woman and her nurturance should bring up responsible and good children to the community.

The notions of "good/ideal mother" and "bad mother" have been a representational trait imposed on women by the society and their peculiar style

of nurturing. According to O'Reilly, "Umansky, in her study of feminism between 1968 and 1982, ascertained two competing feminist views on motherhood: the "negative" discourse that "focus[es] on motherhood as a social mandate, an oppressive institution, a compromise of woman's independence," and the "positive" discourse that argues that "motherhood minus 'patriarchy'[...] holds the truly spectacular potential to bond women to each other and to nature, to foster a liberating knowledge of self, to release the very creativity and generativity that the institution of motherhood denies to women" (pp.2–3). Umansky's classification is drawn from the distinction Rich made between the patriarchal institution of motherhood and a non-patriarchal experience of mothering.

Reyes (2002) adds to the list of definitions and interpretations when she deviates slightly from what other women have defined. She takes a standpoint from women who do not physically bear children but are still called mothers. She observes that a lot of women believe that they are mothers though they have no biological children. She calls them "mother-women". Reyes quickly adds that "mothering-women represent the womanism of wholeness and the vast possibilities for the once-colonized to achieve victory through self-affirmation" (p.9). In this perspective, Reyes is attributing the idea of colonisation to the patriarchal nature of the society or community, or generally, the world and attributes the 'once-colonized' to the women who are under the patriarchal nature of the society. Whilst the self-affirmation makes reference to an independent woman who does not abide by the stereotypical traits and expectations of a mother by this same society or world, this concept opens up another debate in the list of definitions concerning motherhood. She

defines mothering as "a term that conveys the intensity of caregiving on many levels" (p.8).

She further asserts that her definition presupposes caring for the mind, body, intellect and culture of ourselves as well as that of the extended kinship of the community. Her definition centres on the matrilineal diaspora; thereby, interrogating the patrilineal community or diaspora. She diverts her stance a little though when she discusses another kind of mothering which destroys and devours though it can be historical, biological or other. This kind of mothering, which conveys the intensity of caregiving on many levels, according to her, has been dealt with in several ways by different black women across cultures and their main themes deal with issues of fear as well as determent of mothering.

The interpretation of motherhood is stereotypical and, to a very large extent, a definition coined by the patriarchal society. According to Gimenez (2018), motherhood under patriarchy is compulsory because society exerts both structural and ideological pressures upon women to become mothers. Motherhood, therefore, is women's major social role as all women are socially defined as mothers or potential mothers. No woman, achieves her full position in society until she gives birth to a child. This definition, amongst many others, has been vigorously fought against by various African-American women, particularly feminists who are of the view that the definition of motherhood should be given by the defined as she is involved in the processes and not by the patriarchal world which serves as a witness. O'Reilly (2004) shares the same view when she points out that the expectations of the patriarchal society define who an ideal mother is, and at the same time places

her in a "no-win situation" which is considered by feminist mothers as a standard of motherhood which is impractical and unreasonable. Rich stresses that, "As mothers, women have been idealised and also exploited" (1986: xxiv). This statement, reinterpreted, conveys the idea behind the explanation given by feminists with regard to motherhood being coined by the patriarchal world. Reyes (2002) argues that American feminists have challenged the traditional interpretation of mothering which depends solely on the model of the biological mother whose responsibility is to raise her own children as well as offer an ideal model of motherhood for her husband. This implies subordination to others which has flatly been refused by African-American feminists. She leads in the debate that mothering extends beyond sociological as well as biological paradigms or the need to satisfy men "who must have children at all cost" (p.13). Following Reyes and other scholars, I conclude that "mothering may begin with a woman's relationship to a child, but it can no longer simply end at that relationship" (p.14). In sum, mothering has no limit; it extends beyond just a relationship. It involves the totality of the mother right from the onset and never ends.

The contestations of these African-American women with regard to their defined role of motherhood and mothering are worth researching into because African-American women are of the view that their role of mothering is unique from that of other women worldwide because aside the complicated job of being mothers, there are other outside influences which serve as opposition to the task they already have. Thus, according to Rich (1986):

> To be Black and female head of household does not mean possessing wider social and political power, though it can often imply leadership and responsibility within the community. It involves the diverse tasks of providing,

> protecting, teaching, setting goals, always in antagonistic and often violent context of racism (xxvii).

This assertion is argumentative to the extent that mothers all over the world have to deal with unique circumstances in their lives all the time. This assertion by Rich, therefore, is more biased in relation to African-American women than to women worldwide.

O'Reilly (2004) takes the homogeneous black female standpoint, and argues against a dominant view by scholars like Collins who assert that "the dominant ideology of the slave era fostered the creation of four interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination" (p.71). Following the works of Collins, O'Reilly suggests that the four controlling images Collins brings out are: the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare mother, and the Jezebel. She buttresses her point by naming Toni Morrison, the renowned African-American writer who writes extensively on Black American women as a writer whose standpoint on black motherhood challenges as well as enables black women to challenge the controlling images of black motherhood defined by scholars like Collins. She asserts that Morrison's stance enables black women to resist the negative evaluations of black motherhood by rearticulating the power that is inherent in black women's everyday experiences of motherhood. The two interrelated themes that distinguish the African-American tradition of motherhood, as laid out by O'Reilly (2004), are the value and centrality given to mothers and motherhood in the African-American culture. Secondly, the recognition that mothers and mothering are what make possible the physical and psychological well-being as well as empowerment of African-American people and the larger African-

American culture. She attests to the focus of black motherhood in both practice and thought that black motherhood's main aim is to preserve, protect, and specifically to empower black children to resist racist practices that seek to harm them so they grow into adulthood whole and complete. She finds that, African-American culture, irrespective of the presence of patriarchy, empowers mothers and gives prominence to the work of mothering. This prominence focuses on the physical and psychological well-being of children as well as the empowerment of children. It has cultural and political import, value and prominence and that motherhood, as a consequence, is a site of power for black women. I agree with O'Reilly on her stance as she focuses mainly on the African-American culture and its empowerment to women. I am also of the view that this site of power for black women, to a large extent, is essential as it has an implication for this research.

According to hooks (1984), there is an argument from the camp of white, middle class and college educated women that "motherhood was the locus of women's oppression" and that had black women voiced their views on motherhood, it would not have been named a serious obstacle to their freedom as women. She further elaborates that racism, availability of jobs, lack of skills or education and others would have qualified at the top of the list of important issues, but never motherhood. This indicates that motherhood was never classified amongst the important issues within both white and black communities.

Edwards (2005) in her article "Community mothering: The relationship between mothering and the community work of Black women" projects the concept of "othermothering", which, she asserts, developed from the

experience of slavery, together with the care of children and expected task of enslaved black women. These were combined with their field or house duties. Edwards argues that the instability of slavery prompted the adoption of communality which came in the form of nurturing children whose parents, especially mothers, had been sold. She says, "the tradition of communality gave rise to the practice of othermothering" (p.80). O'Reilly (1993) gives a brief historical background to the idea of othermothering when she traces the idea back to the West African traditions which have a continuity to African-American culture as a strategy of survival. This survival ensured all children, regardless of whether the biological mother was present or not, received mothering that included or delivered psychological and physical well-being and made empowerment possible. Collins (1993) refers to biological mothers as blood mothers and attests to the fact that African and African-American women have embraced the notion of othermothering with the idea that motherhood is not invested in only one person, that is the biological mother's responsibility, but also that of the other women around. She claims that othermothers are "women who assist blood mothers by sharing mothering responsibilities, and have traditionally been central to the institution of Black motherhood" (p.47). The term "othermothering", as used in this research, is distinguished from the postcolonialist concept of 'other' which portrays the idea of marginalisation. The inherent meaning of 'other' is still present in 'othermothering' but is uniquely defined as caring for non-biological children. The term 'othermothering' which means "another" signifies the idea of communality amongst the African-American women with regards to nurturing and protecting their children.

hooks (1984) supports this idea of othermothering when she asserts that the responsibility of childcare can be shared with other child rearers or people without children. She emphasises that this form of parenting is revolutionary because of its oppositional stance against the idea that parents, especially mothers, should be the only rearers of the child(ren). (p.144).

Lawson (2004) adds her voice to the ongoing debate when she says "historically and presently, community mothering practices were and are central experiences in the lives of many black women and participation in mothering is a form of emotional and spiritual expression in societies that marginalise Black women" (p.26). I agree that indeed Black women participate in and deem mothering as central experiences but I hesitate to accept wholeheartedly the notion that these types of mothering practices are done in societies which marginalise Black women. This is because this form of mothering is very common in African societies not because the women feel marginalised, but because they find it as a way of empowering each other and living together in unity and communality. Lawson (2004), therefore, might be referring to this kind of mothering in the African-American community in the United States. Abbey and O'Reilly (1998) sum up the idea of othermothering when they assert, "the centrality of women in African American extended families, is well known" (p.206), making reference to the fact that othermothering is an extended concept in motherhood and is typically one of African and the African-American background.

The works above have been foregrounded to indicate my response to the various studies on motherhood. It is obvious that all these works have left a gap which needs to be examined and filled with regard to the term

'mothering'. Though this term may be interchanged with that of 'motherhood', to a very large extent, my research aligns with the view of feminists that they are two different terms, as feminists are of the view that 'mothering' is more empowering to women than motherhood. In my attempt at defining empowering in its basic form, I describe it as a social process of an individual's control over their own lives. This empowerment will be used in discussing and analysing the novels selected: Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black*, Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. These novels have been selected because they are African-American novels written by women and they have been identified with the periods under discussion. The African-American experience is incomplete without the identifying periods labelled as 'slavery', 'flight', and 'freedom' in this research. These periods are marked by slavery, where the African-Americans served as chattel slaves in the various plantations; flight, where slaves ran away from their slave homes to find liberal spaces to inhabit; and, finally, freedom, which represents the end of slavery where Blacks are given space to settle anywhere of their choice but still go through issues of race and abjection because of their history. This research, therefore, seeks to identify the types of mothering techniques employed by the various mother characters in the novels during these three periods and ascertain how empowering each style of mothering was to these women.

Thesis Statement

There are quite a number of reviews and critiques of African-American women's writings on motherhood (Green 2004; O'Reilly 2004; Phoenix &

Woollet 1991; Rich 1986;). Both theoretical and empirical reviews focus on the concept of motherhood and how different women uphold this phenomenon. Wilson (1859), Jacobs (1861), Walker (1982), and Morrison (1987) used strong-willed and independent mother characters in their novels and various scholars have identified these women characters and their roles pertaining to motherhood (Powe 2004; Brooks 2008; Hradil 2009; Ghasemi and Hajizadeh 2012). The literary representations of these female characters in these novels attempt to bridge the gap between fictionality and historicity in the history of the African-American on the American soil. Morrison, for example, based her fiction *Beloved* on a life event of a slave woman and the choices she had to make as a mother in the face of reality in the history of America. However, the practice of mothering which has been defined by O'Reilly as "female-defined and centred and empowering to women" (p.2) and the relationship this has with the female characters in the four novels seem to be inadequately discussed and analysed by scholars. The study, therefore, focuses on the attempt by African-American women writers to narrate the experiences of African-American women and their roles of mothering in three memorable periods. This is to enable a different outlook as well as create a grammar of the terminology of motherhood with regards to the reading of selected African-American women's writings on motherhood and the African-American novel as a whole.

The four books which comprise two autobiographical slave narratives, a neo-slave narrative, and a fictional slave account were chosen because of their narratives as well as their ability to portray various relationships between women and their children in different times.

This thesis employs the qualitative research approach. The analysis would be content-based; hence, the use of content textual analysis. The four texts for the study were purposively sampled to reflect the focus of the research which concentrates on African-American women's writings and the manifestations of motherhood during three periods to be discussed in the research. References are made to other writers as and when necessary.

Research Questions

This thesis is underpinned by the following research questions:

1. How do the mother characters in the novels resist the master narrative set out by the community?
2. In what ways do racial segregation and abjection help define mothering amongst women in the black communities?
3. Which ways do the ambivalent natures of mothering in the four novels theorize black mothering?

Theoretical Framework

This section delves into the various theoretical approaches underpinning this research. The two theories: (psychoanalytic feminism as well as critical race theory) are employed because they speak to the issues being discussed in the various novels. These theories are employed to allow for broader and in-depth analysis of the novels being used.

Psychoanalytic Feminism

This theory began as essays on femininity which challenged Freud in the 1920s and 1930s. This was spearheaded by Karen Horney and others like Melaine Klein who described a model of women with "positive primary

feminine qualities and self-valuation" as opposed to Freud's model of woman as "defective and forever limited"

Psychoanalytic feminists assume gender and sexuality as socially, culturally and psychologically problematic issues, and aim at understanding how gender and sexuality develop and are reproduced in the individual and society at large. These scholars assert that there is the need to confront, challenge, and transform the distorted ideology about women and women's inferiority which Freud discusses in an ad hominem manner in his theory. According to Psychoanalytic feminists, Psychoanalytic feminism is not often historically, socially or culturally specific. To this assertion, I argue that all writing and thinking are always historically, socially and culturally specific.

Chodorow (1989) claims that psychoanalytic feminism is not attuned to differences among women in either class, race and ethnic variations in experience, identity or location. The theory posits the view that women's mothering was the cause or prime mover of male dominance. They focus on the mother and the pre-Oedipal period as a reaction to the Freudian focus on the father and the Oedipus complex. Psychoanalytic feminists argue that human beings are mothered by women instead of men and, therefore, have primary parenting responsibilities which mark very important social and cultural aspects.

According to psychoanalytic feminists, Freud was sexist and wrote from a male norm and ignored that of women. Among other things, Freud conflicted himself in so many ideas and methodologies. They emphasise that Freud's methodologies and statements are anti-woman and, therefore, not

intrinsic to both psychoanalytic theory and the modes of theorising or even clinical interpretation.

Chodorow (1989) asserts that psychoanalytic feminists uphold their theory because psychoanalytic theory is about gender and sexuality. It addresses both social and political issues as there are always issues of development which are mostly centred on social situations. There is also the issue of inequality of both the child and the adult. These inequalities which pertain to both the child and the adult are central to the psychoanalytic theory.

Psychoanalytic feminists believe that psychoanalysis is an interpretive theory of mental process and argue that interpretation can be one way sided; it can either make better or worse without application to morality (right or wrong) or truth or falsehood. These feminists also assert that psychoanalysis is not founded on objective description but rather, the issue of "observer" and "observed" are married to bring out the theory, which is through the interaction as well as the interpretation of that interaction. This makes the interpretation of discourse a very essential aspect of psychoanalysis.

Finally, there is the need, according to psychoanalytic feminists, in the recognition of Freud not only making ad hominem claims about women in his statement of feminists, but by imposing on them the need to regard the two sexes as completely in equal position and worth. In a rebuttal to this assertion by women that he is biased, Freud reiterates his assertion by addressing women psychologists that the statement does not apply to them. He labels them exceptional and describes them as more masculine than feminine in his work "Femininity" (1933).

Psychoanalytic feminists refute the assertion of non-feminist theorists that the structure of parenting is biologically self-explanatory. Chodorow (1978), in *The Reproduction of Mothering*, explains that the idea mothering, though universal, also has instinctual components. Women's mothering as a feature of social structure, has no reality separate or different from the biological fact that women bear children and lactate. They argue then that mothering is more of a natural product than a social construct (p.14). In buttressing this point, Chodorow concludes that women's mothering is a product of behavioural conformity and individual intention.

Psychoanalytic feminists argue on what is believed to be related to psychoanalytic theory which centres on the view of single mother-infant relationship. This view states that usually biological mothers provide almost exclusive care. Psychoanalytic feminists oppose this view. They are of the view that the psychoanalytic theory of the mother-infant relationship, though idealises an implicit claim for exclusive mothering by the birth mother, is arguable on the basis that there is the essence or necessity of care by other people other than the birth mother. This idea, in my opinion, supports the concept of othermothering as purported by African-American feminists (Collins 1993; hooks 1984; Lawson 2004; O'Reilly 1993). For psychoanalytic theorists, "good mother" from an infant's point of view suggests both "constant delicate assessment of infantile needs and wants and an extreme selflessness" (1978: P.84). In an attempt to relate infantile experience with preparedness for parenting, Chodorow quotes Benedek extensively:

> When the infant integrates the memory traces of gratified needs with his developing confidence in his mother, he implants the confidence in his wellbeing, in his thriving good self. In contrast, with the memory traces of frustrating experiences he introjects

> the frustrating mother as "bad mother" and himself as crying and frustrated as "bad self". Thus, he inculcates into his psychic structure the core of ambivalence. These primary ego structures, confidence and the core of ambivalence, originating in the rudimentary emotional experiences of early infancy are significant for the infant of either sex. They determine the child's further relationships with his mother and through it, to a great extent, his personality. A generation later these primary ego structures can be recognised as motivating factors in the parental attitudes of the individual (p.88).

It must be noted that, though psychoanalytic feminism is specifically concerned with revising Freud's oedipal narrative, this theory is used in this study as an attempt to look beyond the obvious explanations behind the motives and the actions plotted of the women or mother characters in the novels under study. In an attempt to reinterpret the mother characters, employing psychoanalytic feminism would bring out the behavioural and psychological aspects, for analysis.

The Critical Race Theory

The Critical Race Theory has been chosen for the research because of its acceptance into literary studies in investigating the subject of motherhood. Using this theory, I will define the roles and analyse the majority of these black women characters who had no formal introduction to feminism, but empowered by their intuitions and acuity, stood up for their children. The theory is also necessary in analyzing the novels because of the context in which this research is situated, specifically the period of slavery and its accompanying periods in the Americas.

Critical Race Theory started in the mid-1970s with Derrick Bell (African-American), Alan Freeman (White American) and Richard Delgado (American) as a response or aggression towards the slow pace in which issues

of race were being addressed in the United States of America. The theory takes its inspiration from other disciplines like philosophy, history, and sociology but concentrates on critical legal studies and feminism. Critical legal studies provide the idea of legal indeterminacy which posits that not every legal case has only one correct outcome. The outcome, however, is determined by either emphasizing one line of authority over another or by interpreting one fact differently from that of one's adversary. This takes inspiration from feminism, which deals more with the relationship between power and the construction of social roles as well as habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination. Critical Race Theory draws its tenets from both European philosophers and theorists like Michel Foucault, Jaques Derrida, Richard Delgado, and Jean Stefancic as well as African-American figures like Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, W.E.B, Du Bois, and Martin Luther King Jr.

The tenets of the theory posit that racism is ordinary, not aberrational. This means it is an everyday activity which is difficult to address or acknowledge, except in cases where the concepts of equality are vividly spelled out. (Delgado & Stefancic 8; Delgado xvi). Omi and Winant (2015) are also of the view that Race and racial meanings are neither stable nor consistent. The second tenet of the theory popularly known as "interest convergence", or sometimes labelled as material determinism, posits that racism favours both classes of Whites, either elites (materially) or working-class (physically). Therefore, the larger part of society is reluctant in eradicating it. The "social construction" is another tenet which says that race and races are both related as well as products of social thought and relations.

To the theorists, race is not based on any inherent or fixed or biological sense. Instead, races, they believe, are societal categories. They further emphasise that, though people share certain traits because of their origins, it does not define the higher genetic origins which are more important and common, which constitute intelligence, moral behaviour, personality, amongst others. Proponents of Critical Race Theory include the idea that race is borne out of the refusal of society to accept or appreciate these important characteristics and also races are categories that society invents, manipulates or retires when convenient. (p.9)

McClintock (1995) is of the view that race, gender, and class are not distinct from each other in terms of experience. She observes:

> Race, gender and class are not distinct realms of experience, existing in splendid isolation from neither each other; nor can they be simply yoked together retrospectively like armatures of Lego. Rather, they come into existence in and through relation to each other – if in contradictory and conflictual ways. In this sense, gender, race and class can be called articulated categories (p.5).

Her stance does not equate race and ethnicity as synonymous with black or the colonized. She is of the same opinion as bell hooks who calls for the production of a discourse on race that will interrogate whiteness. McClintock further emphasises that this whiteness is not invisible, but a problem to be investigated.

I find Critical Race Theory relevant because it highlights the critical role of race in the formation of identity and relationship, amongst others. According to Omi and Winant (2015), since race and racism involve violence, oppression, exploitation and indignity, they also generate movements of resistance and theories of resistance (p.3). In American history and literary

studies, race is a critical factor. As Kwame Anthony Appiah (1990) points out, "differences among people, like differences among communities within a single society, play a central role in our thinking about who "we" are, in…our values and in determining the identities through which we live" (p.287).

Using this framework, I will analyse the majority of these black women characters who defy all odds in the quest to protect their children.

Scope of the Study

The study utilises four African-American novels by women: *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, The Color Purple,* and *Beloved.* The choice of using only female writers is to buttress the idea of mothering and motherhood as a role peculiar to women and one in which women can succinctly and efficiently describe and express.

Significance of the Study

First, this study is meant to be a contribution to the scholarship on the four novels involved: *Our Nig, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, The Color Purple,* and *Beloved.* A plethora of critics have explored different aspects of these novels both individually and comparatively with regards to the phenomenon of mothering or motherhood. This research, therefore, seeks to interrogate the findings from the different individual explorations undertaken, in order to draw a definite conclusion on the debate on motherhood and mothering within the scholarly community. I believe that research that centres on all four novels, using the timelines proposed, will provide deeper insights into the phenomenon of motherhood amongst African-Americans.

Second, I intend to coin a terminology of mothering which has been used by African-American feminists as a practice which is empowering. This

terminology will be coined from the behavioural tendency of a mother towards her child(ren) and will be significant in the reading of African-American novels as a whole. Its implication will be a terminology added to the plethora of motherhood within the African-American feminists and the novels of the African-American women writers.

Finally, the significance of this study resides in its attempt to provide a new theory or theorise the African-American concept of motherhood. This will be done by examining the various mother characters in the four novels under study in an attempt to observe, group and analyse the diverse techniques and modes of nurturing. The groupings, though different in so many ways, project a uniformed and coherent classification for the study of motherhood in the African-American novels.

Organisation of the Thesis

The thesis is organised into seven chapters. The first chapter discusses the background to the study, the thesis statement which has triggered the study, theoretical framework, research questions, as well as the significance of the study.

The second chapter provides a critical survey on African-American women writers and their writings. It traces the history of these women from the eighteenth century through the nineteenth century to date. The chapter also focuses on the biography of the authors of the novels used in this research.

The third chapter is a discussion which focuses on the concepts of mothering and motherhood. It examines relevant critical works by different scholars and their implications.

The fourth chapter, "Resisting the Norm: The Journey of Maternal Sacrifice", delves into the hegemonic matriarchy of the women in two of the novels under study. The novels used will focus on the life of slavery for the mother characters in Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Morrison's *Beloved*. The exploration of how the characters assume both paternal and maternal identities in the quest to protect their children is analysed. This chapter answers the first research question: How do the mother characters in the novels resist the master narrative set out by the community in protecting their children?

The fifth chapter, "Examining Mothering: Race and Abjection in Wilson's *Our Nig* and Walker's *The Color Purple"* discusses the women characters who mothered children and nurtured them during the period of freedom and the era of racial segregation. This chapter answers the second research question: In what ways do racial segregation and abjection help define mothering amongst women in the black communities?

The sixth chapter "Theorizing Black Mothering: The Road to Matriarchy", brings together all the mothers and the periods they find themselves. It takes into consideration how African-American women write their stories on mothering based on their experiences. It discusses how these women characters find solace and empowerment in mothering. This chapter answers the third research question: In what ways do the ambivalent nature of mothering in the four novels theorize black mothering? It will focus on all the four novels used in this research.

The seventh chapter is the conclusion to the thesis. It discusses the findings and makes recommendations for further research.

Conclusion

This chapter introduces the research I intend to undertake. It has focused on the background of the work, detailing different dimensions of mothering and motherhood as explained and detailed by various scholars from a range of perspectives and areas. The chapter also discusses the thesis statement, research questions, and significance of the study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

The previous chapter was a background to the research. It entailed the various definitions of the terms, motherhood and mothering. It also outlined the focus of the researcher on the research. This chapter gives a brief exposition of the novels under study. It presents a historical overview of African-American women writers and their works in order to situate the works of these selected women writers for the research.

Historical Background of African-American Women Writers

In my opinion, many African-American women authors embraced the idea of writing because of the impact they wanted to make and their ideologies they wanted to sell to the world about the African-American women. These ideas gave the African-American women writers the opportunity to be at the forefront of creating a literary tradition. Some of these African-American women writers were Frances Harper, Pauline Hopkins, Jessie Fauset, Nella Larsen, Ann Petry, Gwendolyn Brooks, Andre Lorde, Gloria Naylor, and Adrienne Kennedy.

According to Nunes, some of the novels of African-American women, in their narratives on slavery and other free narratives, sought not only to mirror a society but also change it. Writers like Harriet Jacobs, Frances Harper and Hopkins for instance wrote to effect social change which till date is being developed by contemporary novelists.

Writers like Walker, Jones, Morrison, and Jacobs have been acknowledged for their important roles in the lives of the African-American.

Nunes (2011) acknowledges Jacobs in her work *Incidents in the life of a slave girl* as a "benchmark that establishes the female perspective on black history and experience in contemporary female authors" (p.173). She also praises Morrison's *Beloved* as using magical realism "which employs the necessary narrative strategy through which a lost history can be created". She situates Morrison's use of the magical realism within the roots of the beliefs of the African-American folklore. (p.177).

African-American women have come a long way in establishing themselves in the literary world and making their voices heard and acknowledged. Writings from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries went through various stages of both rejection and obscurity. It took a lot of effort from various African-American women in all walks of life to recover some important texts which have become important to the history of the African-American experience.

To quote Nunes (2011):

> In their quest to represent the female African-American experience, the writers seek and develop distinct African-American modes. In these novels, memory is a critical element not only because it is crucial to the reconstruction of an unwritten past but also because the way one remembers shapes the structure of the narrative. Thus, these novelists engage in the double exercise of acknowledging black oral traditions, while reinventing them in order to pursue new modes of representing the African-American experience (p.178).

The issue of literacy was a major problem with regard to chattel slavery. Only a few privileged slaves had the opportunity to be taught to read and write. Others also found a way to read and write despite the circumstances and challenges they found themselves in. When African-Americans started publishing, the literature remained inaccessible to the public until much later

when the Civil Rights Movement showed interest in the lifestyles of black people. This interest entailed every aspect of their lives: thought, behavior, as well as achievements in the late 1960s. According to Nunes (2011), the limitation of information or access played a key influence in the African-American historical novels. Books like Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) and Charles Johnson's *Oxherding Tale* (1982) brought to the fore issues like infanticide and the sexual exploitation of slave men. Nunes is of the view that works on this period emphasized the experience of the enslaved self together with other literature in the nineteenth century which was categorized in the realm of the unspeakable.

The world's Congress of Representative Women on May 20th, 1893, as part of the Columbian Exposition in Chicago, signified a major change in the attitude and mentality of the Black woman. This Congress, though a known White Women's forum, featured six Black women: Fannie Barrier Williams, Sarah J. Early, Hallie Quinn Brown, Anna Julia Cooper, Fannie Jackson Coppin and Frances Harper. It was at this forum that Black women asserted their stance in questioning matters pertaining to women in general, irrespective of their colour. They appealed to White women who, when juxtaposed with Black women, had several advantages in terms of sexual autonomy as well as emancipation, to join them in solidarity in all aspects of their lives including sex, race, country and condition.

Though there was the continual persistence and fight from the camp of the African-American women to be made part of a nationally organized suffrage as well as other movements, there were opposing forces from women like Ida B. Wells, a Haitian who asked for the exclusion of the Afro-American

from the exposition with a pamphlet she had edited titled, *The Reason Why: The Colored American is not in the World's Columbian Exposition.* The fight for Black representation to the National Board of Commissioners for the exposition began at the presidential level but did not yield any good results.

Carby (1987) argues that the turn of events in the century, though dedicated to the age of Washington and Du Bois, was a period in which there was intense activity and productivity for Afro-American women. Publications by African-American writers began intensively before the Congress of Representative Women. The first Congress of Colored Women of the United States was convened in Boston in the year 1895 and more congresses and conferences followed. It was one of these subsequent conferences that led to the formation of the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) which organized women to confront the various modes of oppression they encountered. This association was to provide a forum in which the exchange of ideas among African-American women intellectuals was within a structure that could disseminate this information nationally. This Congress gave the African-American women hope and courage to voice their grievances and fears. Unlike the Colombian Exposition which they labelled "the great American white Elephant" and "the white American's World's Fair" (p.5) this was a Congress which was for them (African-American women) and spoke to their needs and aspirations. Notable amongst these women were Anna Julie Cooper and Ida B. Wells who theorized the relationships among race, gender and patriarchy in their writings. The Congress or forum, as has been described by Carby (1987), focused on the notion that "organizing to fight meant also writing to organize" (p.97). These women fought and debated on various

issues amongst which were the issue of race, which had been labelled as the central American dilemma. The welfare of the Black woman was prioritized above all others because of the belief that it is only when the Black women collectively had the power to determine their future that the entire race could move forward. This assumption led to the famous quote by Cooper: "Only the Black Woman can say 'when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole Negro race enters with me" (p.99).

Many more organisations and congresses were formed and held to enable African-American women to ascertain and discuss matters pertaining to them. More women began to write and question issues on various subjects. Others like Pauline Hopkins wrote novels like *Contending Forces: A Romance Illustrative of Negro Life North and South* and *Hagar's Daughter: A Story of Southern Caste Prejudice*. A magazine was issued with different editions by the African-American community called *The Colored American Magazine* which was published by the Colored Co-operative Publishing Company of Boston, which became a collective attempt to put together practices of literature, art, and political agitation for social change.

In 1977, Barbara Smith's "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" argued that lack of autonomous Black movement had an influence on the neglect of black women writers and artists and this was because there was the issue of power or support not given to those who were ready to examine Black women's experience. This led to the importance of feminist movement which contributed to the growth of feminist literature, criticism and women's studies. Carby (1987) describes Barbara Smith's "Toward a Black feminist Criticism"

as a manifesto for Black feminist critics. Her work has been identified as a radical departure from a previous work by Mary Helen Washington titled *Black-Eyed Susans*, two years earlier. Smith's work did not go unnoticed and attracted criticisms from a wide range of scholars, including Alice Walker. This brought about the reprint of the manifesto which was titled *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of us are Brave*. This work was dedicated to the establishment of Black Women's Studies in the Academy.

The Black woman became literarily productive in the second half of the nineteenth century. From the nineteenth century till date, many other African-American women have been popularized and hailed. Amongst the famous African-American women writers are: Harriet Jacobs (1813-1897), Zora Neale Hurston (1891- 1960), Octavia Butler (1970-2006), Alice Walker (1944 to date), Maya Angelou (1928-2014), and Toni Morrison (1931-2019). These women have re-lived the African-American experiences of slavery and motherhood, in many of their neo slave narratives. They have portrayed what it is like living as an African-American woman in the United States of America.

Summary of Biography of Authors and Texts

This section focuses on the summary of biographies of the various authors and their works. The main significance of this is to provide the background of the authors as well as the storyline of each book being used in this research.

Harriet Wilson (1825-1900) ***Our Nig: Sketches from the Life of a Free Black***

Harriet Wilson was born on 15th March, 1825 as Harriet "Hattie" E. Adams in Milford, New Hampshire to Joshua Green an African-American, and Margaret Adams/Smith, a white washerwoman. Her father died in 1828 and her mother remarried. She was abandoned in 1830 by her mother at the Hayward home of the Bellmonts in Milford where she served as an indentured servant. Her mother later died in 1830. She had the opportunity to attend school at the District School for three months a year for three years between 1832 to 1834.

She moved from the Hayward home of the Bellmonts and worked for other people but ill health was a constant problem. She married Thomas Wilson, a fugitive slave of Massachusetts in Milford, New Hampshire on 6th October, 1851 and gave birth to George Mason Wilson in 1852 in New Hamspshire. Thomas Wilson died in 1853 of fever leaving behind Harriet and her son to cater for themselves. Harriet Wilson started a successful business selling hair products. She had *Our Nig* copyrighted in 1859 and published in that same year. The intent of writing the novel was to earn enough money to survive as well as to take her son back to live with her. Her son George died in February 1860, aged seven years, eight months.

She joined the Massachusetts Spiritualist Association in 1867 and became known as "the colored medium". She gained popularity and delivered addresses and lectures in various camp meetings. She got married again in 1870 at the age of thirty-seven to John Gallatin Robinson, aged, twenty-six.

Her interest in spiritual movements and Sunday school for the children of spiritualists continued till her death in June 1900 at the Quincy Hospital, Massachusetts.

The autobiographical novel *Our Nig*, centres on a mulatto girl, Frado who is abandoned by her mother at the age of six to a white family in Boston named the Bellmonts. She becomes an indentured slave to them and suffers brutalities at the hands of her mistress and her daughter. Unlike the two women, Mr. Bellmont and his sons, James and Jack as well as Aunt Abby, sister of Mr. Bellmont, are portrayed as kind and humane. Frado seeks solace in God when Aunt Abby teaches her about God and the Bible by inviting her to a church meeting. Frado leaves the Bellmonts' house at the age of eighteen when her indenture contract elapses and she learns to sew. Her ailing health becomes a problem and she is unable to work effectively over a period of time. She later marries a fugitive slave named Samuel who lectures on abolition. They have a child together. Samuel later dies of a fever, leaving Frado to struggle with her child in order to make ends meet.

Harriet Jacobs (1813 - 1897) ***Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl***

Harriet Ann Jacobs was born into slavery in Edenton, North Carolina. Margaret Horniblow, her owner until she was eleven-years-old, taught her to read and sew. When Horniblow died, Harriet and her brother became the property of Mrs. Horniblow's brother, Dr. James Norcom. Harriet Jacobs subsequently had two children with a single white man who was not her owner.

For almost seven years Jacobs hid in a crawlspace in her grandmother's house to avoid her master, Dr. Norcom. She escaped in 1835

and settled in New York City, where she was a domestic worker for the family of Nathaniel Parker Willis. In 1861, she published her autobiography *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* under the pseudonym *Linda Brent*. She also used false names for other characters in her book.

For most of the twentieth century, the American public believed that Linda Brent was a white woman and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* was a work of fiction. Harriet Jacobs' true identity was not established until the 1980s. Today, her autobiography is regarded as the most in-depth slave narrative written by a black woman in America.

Her discovery uncovered other events in her life after 1861. She worked as a clerk for the New England Women's Club and operated a boarding house that catered to students and faculty at Harvard University. She served as a relief worker during the Civil War and worked among the needy freed people in Washington, DC. Her publications include: *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861).

The autobiographical book *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* reveals the life of a slave girl, Linda Brent. Born into her grandmother's home and with the presence of her parents, sibling, grandmother and some relatives, Linda is unaware of being a slave until her mother's death at the age of six. The death of her mother opens a new chapter in her life as she is sent to live with her mother's mistress. She is taught reading and writing by her mistress, an abominable feat for slaves. After the death of her benefactor, she is sent to live with the Flints, where she becomes a slave to the young mistress. Dr. Flint makes sexual advances towards her. These advances pressurize Linda into having an affair with Mr. Sands, a white neighbour. Their relationship yields

two children. In an attempt to free her children from the pangs of slavery, Linda hides in an attic under her grandmother's house for about seven years whilst everyone assumes that she has fled to the North. This causes Dr. Flint to sell her children with the fear that they are better off being sold than having them disappear just like their mother. The children are purchased by Mr. Sands, through a middleman and the girl, Ellen is sent to Washington D.C. to babysit the new born of Mr. Sands. Linda finally escapes from the attic to reconcile with her daughter, then finally, her son despite the bounty put on their heads by Dr. Flint. She ends her story by telling her readers that she has not obtained total freedom because she is still under the employ of Mrs. Bruce. Her, children though, are free.

Alice Walker (1944 to date) *The Color Purple*

Alice Walker is known as a writer and activist. She is the author of *The Color Purple*. She is also known for recovering the work by Zora Neale Hurston and for her work against female circumcision titled *Possessing the Secret of Joy*. She won the Pulitzer Prize in 1983.

Alice Walker, best known perhaps as the author of *The Color Purple*, was the eighth child of Georgia sharecroppers. After a childhood accident blinded her in one eye, she went on to become the valedictorian of her local school, and attended Spelman College and Sarah Lawrence College on scholarships, graduating in 1965. She volunteered in the voter registration drives of the 1960s in Georgia and went to work after college in the Welfare Department in New York City.

Alice Walker married in 1967 (and divorced in 1976). Her first book of poems came out in 1968 and her first novel just after her daughter's birth in

1970. Alice Walker's early poems, novels, and short stories dealt with themes familiar to readers of her later works: rape, violence, isolation, troubled relationships, multi-generational perspectives, sexism and racism.

When *The Color Purple* came out in 1982, Walker became known to an even wider audience. Her Pulitzer Prize and the movie by Steven Spielberg brought both fame and controversy. She was widely criticized for negative portrayals of men in *The Color Purple,* though many critics admitted that the movie presented more simplistic negative pictures than the book's more nuanced portrayals. She also published a biography of the poet, Langston Hughes, and worked to recover and publicize the nearly-lost works of writer Zora Neale Hurston. She is credited with introducing the word "womanist" for African-American feminism.

In 1989 and 1992, in two books, *The Temple of My Familiar* and *Possessing the Secret of Joy,* Walker explored the issue of female circumcision in Africa, which brought further controversy: was Walker a cultural imperialist to criticize a different culture? Her novel *Possessing the Secret of Joy* is considered as a sequel to *The Color Purple* because of the continuity in the plot as well as some characters.

Her works are known for their portrayals of the African American woman's life. She depicts vividly the sexism, racism, and poverty that make that life often a struggle. She also portrays as part of that life, the strengths of family, community, self-worth, and spirituality.

Many of her novels depict women in other periods of history than our own. Just as with non-fiction women's history writing, such portrayals give a

sense of the differences and similarities of women's condition today and in those other periods.

Alice Walker continues not only to write but is active in environmental, feminist/womanist causes, and issues of economic justice. Her publications include: *The Color Purple* (1982), *Everyday Use* (1973), *In Search of our Mother's Garden* (1983), *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992), *The Temple of my Familiar* (1989).

The story of *The Color Purple* revolves around two sisters, Celie and Nettie who remained loyal and united through the struggles of time. Celie, the protagonist in the novel, is a fourteen-year-old who writes letters to God because she is raped by her father, Alphonso. She becomes pregnant on two occasions and the babies born to her are taken away by her father. She is married off to a man by name Mr._ who is old enough to be her father. Her marriage exposes her to many hardships and difficulties as well as incidents which include a sexual relationship with Shug Avery her husband's lover. This relationship between the two women opens up the issue of Nettie and with the help of Shug, Celie recovers all the letters Nettie had written to her over the years which had been in Mr._'s possession. Nettie had found out that the children of the missionary couple she had been with all that while were the biological children of her sister Celie who had been presumed dead a long time ago. Nettie also discovers the man they grow up with is not their biological father but their step-father. Celie moves to another state with Shug and Squeak and begins her own business of sewing pants. Celie returns from where she resides later to reconcile with her husband Mr._ and her sister, Nettie, who finally marries the missionary Samuel.

Toni Morrison (1931 to 2019) *Beloved*

Born on February 18, 1931, in Lorain, Ohio, Toni Morrison is a Nobel Prize- and Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist, editor and professor. Her novels are known for their epic themes, exquisite language and richly detailed African-American characters who are central to their narratives. Among her best-known novels are *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Beloved*, *Jazz*, *Love* and *A Mercy*. Morrison has earned a plethora of book-world accolades and honorary degrees, also receiving the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2012.

She was born Chloe Anthony Wofford on February 18, 1931, in Lorain. Toni Morrison was the second oldest of four children. Her father, George Wofford, worked primarily as a welder, but held several jobs at once to support the family. Her mother, Ramah, was a domestic worker. Morrison graduated from Lorain High School with honors in 1949. At Howard University, Morrison continued to pursue her interest in literature. She majored in English and chose the classics for her minor. After graduating from Howard in 1953, Morrison continued her education at Cornell University. She wrote her thesis on the works of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner, and completed her master's degree in 1955. She then moved to the Lone Star State to teach at Texas Southern University.

In 1957, she returned to Howard University to teach English. There she met Harold Morrison, an architect originally from Jamaica. The couple married in 1958 and welcomed their first child, Harold, in 1961. After the birth of her son, Morrison joined a group of writers that met on campus. She began working on her first novel with the group, which started out as a short story.

Morrison decided to leave Howard in 1963. She moved back home to live with her family in Ohio before the birth of son Slade in 1964. The following year, she moved with her sons to Syracuse, New York, where she worked for a textbook publisher as a senior editor. Morrison later went to work for Random House, where she edited works by Toni Cade Bambara and Gayl Jones, renowned for their literary fiction, as well as luminaries like Angela Davis and Muhammad Ali.

The novel *Beloved* is based on the life story of Margaret Garner, an African-American slave who committed infanticide in an attempt to protect herself and her children from being taken back into slavery. Sethe, the main character in the novel, is a runaway slave who together with her children lives peacefully and harmoniously as a family amongst other free slaves till her slave master located her whereabouts and attempted to take them back into the plantation. The thought of being taken back into slavery caused her in killing one of her children and attempting to kill the others. The murdered child returns as a young girl called Beloved, to Sethe's house to display her love and also find out reasons why she was murdered in cold blood. The ensuing relationship between mother and daughter opens up old issues. The extent of damage being done due to the relationship between these two pushes Denver, the other daughter of Sethe to seek help from others. The townsfolk, especially the women organise themselves and exorcise Beloved. The exorcism leads to Beloved's disappearance. Sethe becomes depressed after the disappearance and blames herself for all that happens.

Review of Selected Texts

This section provides a detailed review of scholarly views and criticisms generated by the four novels under study.

Miller (2016), in "Whiteness, the Real Intermediary Agent: Harriet E. Wilson's Medium for Amalgamation in *Our Nig; or, Sketches in the Life of a Free Black"* discusses how Wilson manipulates the voice of her text, by allowing only Frado to speak through the Bellmonts. Wilson exhibits the Foucauldian notion of power which suggests that power is universal. Wilson also manipulates the work of fiction to include elements of autobiography which move between first- person narration, a sign of autobiography and third-person narration which questions the validity of the semi-autobiographical work of fiction.

According to Miller, Wilson is not Frado, given that the novel is fiction but there is a bit of autobiography which indicates that Wilson has Frado embodied through the Bellmonts. Miller stresses that Wilson solidifies Frado's existence as a non-person by italicizing the word "our" to give the notion that she is not anyone's Nig, but "Our Nig".

Miller is of the view that Wilson gives the audience two versions of Frado: the one embodied by the Bellmonts which is physically present on the page, and the one disembodied by the Bellmonts which is completely missing from the text of the novel. In my opinion, it is obvious that since the novel *Our Nig* is semi-autobiographical, it will obviously have various versions of the protagonist. The author, therefore, decides which version to embody and which to disembody.

In discussing whether Wilson's *Our Nig* is semi-autobiographical or fictional, there is another dimension which Farber (2010) argues that Wilson's *Our Nig* unveiled the hypocrisy of the Northern Abolitionists' agenda, which was an advocate to end slavery. Farber observes that the title of the novel instantly depicts a slave narrative despite the setting being in the North where slavery had been abolished and the writer being a free black.

She opposes the notion by Wilson that her book is not a slave narrative because though she lives in the free North, the writing illustrates otherwise. She is beaten by people who label themselves as Christians, allowed only three years of schooling and experiences moments of defiance. Farber expresses the view that the only difference between Frado in Wilson's *Our Nig* and other characters in slave narratives is that she is an indentured servant.

To Farber, Wilson deviates from the conventions of slave narratives by her illustrations of oppression not through slavery but rather, racism. This is because Frado, the protagonist in the novel, suffers all forms of abuse not because she is a slave, but more importantly because she is deemed as a Black girl. One important physical racial distinction between blacks and whites is the hair texture. Frado's hair has a resemblance to that of a white person, the main reason why Mrs. Bellmont cuts her hair. I agree with Farber that the novel *Our Nig* is no different from most slave narratives. Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, though autobiographical, is also considered as a slave narrative. The only contestation is what has been illustrated by Farber as oppression through racism, instead of slavery. It is important to point out that the oppression meted out to Frado is similar to that meted out to slaves in the plantations. The observation made is obvious in that both Frado and slaves

had to undergo oppression due to the colour of the skin which signified black. In my opinion therefore, there is a very thin line between oppression and racism in African-American history with regards to the colour of one's skin.

To buttress the issues of oppression and racism further, Krah (2004) focuses on the relationship between white defined nineteenth century notions of femininity and black female experience by exploring Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) and Wilson's *Our Nig.* She opines that both Jacobs and Wilson claimed authority to speak but Wilson's radicalism made *Our Nig* unappealing to her contemporaries as well as undermined the Victorian concept of womanhood and deconstructed conventional roles.

Krah is of the view that the theme of maternity is found in the whole novel though the image of motherhood is not in line with the image of nurturing motherhood. She says, "*Our Nig* functions as a refutation of the myth of motherhood as the moral in an immoral world" (p.469). It is observed also that Wilson's painting of maternity is inseparable from her treatment of home and domesticity. The kitchen is portrayed as a site of violence as well as Mrs. Bellmont's lust for power. For instance, the idea of religion and piety is also construed in the novel *Our Nig* as Wilson juxtaposes Frado's piety with that of Mrs. Bellmont.

Krah projects that Frado's characterisation is ambiguous. She is referred to as a "beautiful mulatto" and then ascribed other features as "roguish", "wild, and frolicky". These traits are ascribed to boys rather than girls. She becomes associated with both female and male gendered spaces. She attempts connecting the identity of the trickster in its strategies to both Jacobs

and Wilson by asserting that Frado's innocence in her religious queries masks the critique of Christianity. This discourse of hers is, therefore, marked by "a double-voicedness characteristic of the trickster". According to Krah, Wilson undertakes a reversal of gender roles in *Our Nig*.

Krah argues that Wilson, in her attempt to reject roles offered by the dominant ideology available to women, dismantled a system of belief that was the primary shaper of the perception of her audience and failed to put forward a new model of black identity and secure an audience for her novel. This issue of discussing identity is further discussed by Ernest (1994) who establishes Frado's identity to her white mother's experience as a product of Northern United States culture which opposed slavery. He opines that cultural identity is maintained at the expense of individual moral character. Hence, though Mag Smith repents, she remains an outsider and Frado becomes the outcome of the transgressions. She is, therefore, the cultural product who is defined before birth and this identity eventually finds way on the title page as *Our Nig*. Ernest claims that Frado is a victim of both an oppressive culture and her own experiences.

He concludes:

> Throughout this narrative, Wilson maintains implicitly that community can come only from the recognition of conflict and that the nation can progress only by way of ongoing negotiations amongst antagonists who acknowledge that each has something another needs to survive, in a world governed by God. (p.435).

The issue of identity, I am of the view, brings into contestation who Frado really is and where she belongs. At one time she is a Nigger, at another time, she is a Mulatto. These two identities are very important in analysing the

character of Frado as a slave to a White family and as a daughter to a White woman.

In "Dwelling in the House of Oppression: The Spatial, Racial and Textual Dynamics of Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig"*, Leveen (2001) attempts a look at the divisions of class and race in both Frado and the Bellmonts and examines how Wilson depicts oppression as a foundation for racial and spatial practices in the house. In the perspective of Leveen therefore, Wilson's position as a novelist suggests: a black woman exerting her authority over domestic space. This is done through telling her version of the happenings, and escaping the limitations of domestic service by becoming a writer. Leeven presumes that the sub title of the novel "*Sketches from the Life of a free Black, in a Two-Story White-House, North. Showing that Slavery's shadows fall even there"* gives the novel a set of both relations and disjunctions. To her, the identity "nig", though assigned to a free black seems quite odd. The use of *Our Nig* itself indicates a collectively owned object rather than a self-owned subject. By this assertion, she implies that the use of "our" which is collective added to 'Nig' makes Frado a collectively owned property of the Bellmonts, and not an individual who has possession or controls her own being.

According to Leeven, the use of "free black" against "white house" is a contrast and so is the antonymic relationship between "black" and "white", which further suggests an opposition between "free" and "house". It is concluded that the disjunction of *Our Nig* against "free black" and "free black" against "white house" are underscored by the word "slavery". She is of the view that the novel should not be read only as a text which bemoans the treatment of African-Americans in the North as well as South. It should also

be seen as a condemnation of the conditions of African-Americans in post slavery society. She buttresses the view that *Our Nig* offers two responses to the spatialized manifestations of race and class difference. These are exhibition by James, a Bellmont son who directly challenges spatial segregation. The second involves Frado, who is involved in a subverse occupation of racially designated spaces. These two manifestations imply the negative attitude of some White people like James towards the idea of spatial segregation and the positive attitude of some Black people towards the idea of racial segregation.

Leeven explains that the novel gives space for the African-American woman as an author but this is done through an often disturbing representation of the domestic spaces which reduces the African-American girl to a Nig. The reduction of an African-American girl to a Nig encompasses many different views. Therefore, in "Speaking the Body's Pain: Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig"*, Davis (1993) is of the view that Wilson introduces *Our Nig* through the images of blood, sorrow, suffering and crucifixion. For Davis, therefore, Wilson is able to portray to the reader, the transformation of Frado's body which used to be her strongest asset, to her greatest liability. Frado's body or physical experience was borne out of pain and not sexuality.

Davis is of the view that *Our Nig* uses descriptions of pain not to reinscribe racial difference but to transcend it. What makes *Our Nig* unique from the other narratives is that instead of allowing the pain to silence her, it is rather the pain which compels her to speak. According to Davis, *Our Nig* 'signifies' the dominant representation of black women during the nineteenth century as being sexually loose by using a white woman's body instead. She

represented the white mother Mag Smith as promiscuous and not Frado herself. Davis opines that pain in *Our Nig* "defines voice and body, the speaker and the spoken" (p.396). The pain and torture which Frado experiences have been given as a metonym for sexual exploitation. I am of a different opinion with this assertion of pain and torture being metonym for sexual exploitation. This is because *Our Nig* does not give any instance where there is any form of sexual harassment meted out to Frado. Pain and torture, therefore, cannot in any way relate to sexual exploitation as has been implied by Davis.

According to Davis, the ability of Wilson, a black woman to speak her own pain means she has "quite literally mapped out unchartered territory, in which both pain and the black female body are redefined via powerful language as capable of both power and language" (p.399). Language in *Our Nig* is no longer antithetical to pain; instead, language seems to make pain and even *Our Nig* herself intelligent.

Davis argues that *Our Nig* is an important novel because of its ability to delineate the images between black women held by the society and Wilson's refutation of these same images. Frado, therefore, uses her body to serve as her passion and her escape as well as the source of both her pain and her inspiration. It is through her pain that Wilson finds her voice as well as her ability to survive torture and put to an end to the suffering of her son. This brings to fore Kocsoy (2013) who explores the racial ideologies in the novel. She believes that the institution of slavery "was in many ways an atypical form which depends on a peculiar mixture of Western colonialist ideology, racism and economic demands" (p.1247). She describes two ideologies in the

novel: the hypocrite Northern racist ideology and the protagonist's Frado's ideology of equality and freedom.

Kocsoy asserts that the title of the novel signifies racism and not affection. The dualities in the title and descriptive subtitle are evident as the words are juxtaposed to create the dualities of Nig/ Free Black, Free Black/ White house and North/ Slavery's Shadows. These represent the contradictions of racist ideologies of the North. Kocsoy argues that the novel *Our Nig*, does not talk about Slavery in the South, but rather about the plight of a "free black child born in free state and suffers abuse as a free black in a white house, North." (p.1258).

She talks about the dual characters found in the house in the form of Mrs. Bellmont and her daughter Mary who oppress and encourage racism against Mr. Bellmont and his son James and Jack who are very sympathetic towards the plight of the Blacks, especially Frado who lives with them. She concludes that Wilson's *Our Nig* brings to light the degrading system and institutions whilst undermining the Northern racist ideology by alerting people to the plight of the black people. To Kocsoy, Wilson "touches a universal issue: the sharing of pain doing nothing. Real solutions to problems come first from one's speaking for oneself; Wilson/Frado survives mostly through speech, not through marriage, religion or charity" (p.1272). Wilson, therefore, being the first black writer to find her own voice, paves the way for other black writers in finding their voices too and tell their truth. I agree with Kocsoy that it is imperative for a person to voice his or her feelings, thoughts and emotions. Wilson does exactly that in her novel, making her outstanding and worthy of emulation by subsequent Black writers.

In a similar paper titled *"Our Nig*, by Harriet E. Wilson: Frado and the characterization of oppression", Araujo and Schneider (2017) look beyond the intention of Wilson in telling her story to understanding the context and condition of the protagonist. They emphasise that Wilson's message which she wanted to get across centered on the fact that she was a free Black American, a Black writer, a writer and finally, a woman (p.196). These were the reasons why she stated the necessity of being read by her brethren and making the Black people identify with her story.

Araujo and Schneider also argue that Wilson's story, through Frado, gives an example of the different types of oppression Black females go through. They support Crenshaw's idea of intersectionality and provide two types of oppression: violence, in which women of colour are the victims, and oppression towards them. Mrs. Bellmont is observed to be the aggressive, abusive figure in the household. Interestingly, she is a woman. They agree with Leveen (2001) who observes that the Bellmont house follows the imperatives of slavery and challenge the notion of white female authority by showing how unjust and aggressive a white woman in a position of power can be in relation to a Black woman.

As part of their paper in explaining the modalities of oppression experienced by Frado, Araujo and Schneider mention the name 'Nig', imposed on her. The word 'Nig' is used to undermine her as a human being in the family. It also takes away her identity and dehumanizes her. There is also the issue of prejudice because of her class position. The novel asserts her lower class in the attires she wears and being made fun of by the other kids in

school. Her oppression is also found on the religious level to the extent that she hates God for making her black.

Araujo and Schneider state that Wilson's autobiographical novel differs from that of the mid-nineteenth century African-American women's writing because though these mid-nineteenth century African American women could choose to write about their lives, they could not choose to write about the injustice of those lives. Araujo and Schneider conclude that *Our Nig* is a work that "looks into the future, and hopes for a world where Black women are given space, respect and opportunities." (p.209).

Looking at the novel from the perspective of humour, Boyle (2014) opines that though the novel centers on a tragic story, it is undermined by short comic sketches performed by Frado. Boyle states that Wilson's protagonist is among many comedians in the African-American antebellum culture. Authors, actors and characters used a spectacular brand of humour in addressing the violence of racism and slavery. In her opinion, this kind of black humour only recently began attracting serious scholarship. Boyle explains that Wilson chose a cold and earnest form of satire instead of a performative humour that inspires laughter to alienate readers.

She further holds that Wilson's humour is not as uniform as suggested and that the practical jokes in the novel are deliberate and sophisticated comic strategies that exploit the body's potential for subversive performance. Boyle further states that Wilson strategises her humour in three sections. The first section portrays how she uses Frado's body in animating and then defamiliarising the Tofsy stereotype in order to expose alienation and dispossession of popular performances of blackness. Secondly, there is the use

of Frado to reinterpret other popular stereotypes in other to highlight the violence inherent in racist caricature. Finally, Wilson turns the joke on to her white readers in an extended burlesque portrayal of the Bellmont family, ultimately revealing whiteness, like blackness, as a performative identity. The target of this burlesquing is Mary Bellmont.

She concludes that Wilson has been branded as a powerful satiric voice in that her voice and attack on "racial and religious hypocrisy, her defence of social justice and the right of indentured servants, even her ties to abolitionism are mediated through her excoriating brand of humour" (p.11).

This section of the review has focused on reviews written on Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* based on racism and its related issues, autobiographical concerns, oppression, humour, and others in an attempt to enable the researcher to situate her analysis better in the ongoing scholarship on the novel. The issues of motherhood and racism would play important roles in the central thesis which focuses on motherhood with regards to the African-American woman. This review is also pertinent in the analysis which concentrates on racial segregation and abjection in the novel. Though this review highlights the ongoing study to an extent, it must be stated that there are still gaps to be filled in relation to the issue of motherhood in the African-American context.

Reviews on Jacobs' Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl

The reviews pertaining to Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* are pertinent for this research because they also address issues related to motherhood which this thesis seeks to analyse.

Holmgreen (2016) focuses on the narrative strategy in which Jacobs represents places with varying temporalities by employing Bhaktin's (1981) concept of chronotope defined as the configuration of time and space in a text.

Holmgren posits that the most important chronotope in *Incidents* is the family house. According to her, Jacobs uses her grandmother's house as a site of negotiation as well as a place of "arbitration and revision of issues concerning race, class, sexuality, nationality and gender." (p.20). She argues that the narrative of Jacobs is entirely linear. She also discusses Dr. Flint's house as one whose chronotope lacks moral and emotional center which should have been provided for by his wife. She further describes the garret she stayed in for 7 years as a chronotope that "interacts closely with the chronotope of the grandmother's house, although it is not identical with it" (p.29). This suggests closely associated spaces but different in so many ways including the space of freedom.

Holmgren argues that the chronotope is useful in reading relations "between spaces, temporalities, genre conventions, characterisation, and ideology in Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl"* and the chronotopes observed; Dr. Flint's house, the provincial town, the grandmother's house and the garret all come together to describe the sophisticated narrative strategies used by Jacobs in reaching and criticizing her white Northern readers I add my voice to Holmgren's assertion that the concept of chronotope is very essential in discussing the various characters and their temporalities as well as their uniqueness in the novel. The chronotope defines and describes the various actions and important moments not only in the life of the protagonist, but all those involved with the

protagonist one way or the other in presenting the plot development of the novel.

Slavery and religion play very important roles in some African-American novels. Ganaah (2016) in her article titled, "Themes of slavery, Christianity and descriptions of paradox in the practice of Christianity in two slave narratives: Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Harriet Wilson's *OUR NIG Sketches from the Life of a Free Black"*, is of the view that both books discuss the different attitudes of both slaves and their masters to Christianity. She also indicates that there are contradictions between the faith and the actions of slave owners, leading to the use of Christianity as a tool of control and liberation by the slave masters and the slaves. Ganaah also describes the paradoxes found in the two books with regards to the slave masters and their slaves. The paradox in the practice of Christianity is openly discussed in the two novels. In my opinion, religion in particular is used as an oppressive tool in the lives of both the oppressor and the oppressed.

In discussing matters pertaining to the oppressor and the oppressed, Nardi (2014) discusses slave narratives written by women, and does a theoretical treatment using Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. According to Nardi, women's slave narratives are not popular as compared to those of men. The issue of the runaway female slave has now been uncovered through recent commentaries on slave narratives. This has given a new dimension to the image of the slave woman, subverting the common stereotypes and associations related to them.

The portrayal of women in slave narratives has always been that of vulnerability and objects of sexual abuse but this trend has changed, and according to Nardi, this is because of the new role of women from silent objects to protagonists. There is a comparison between the male and the female slave narratives. Male slave narratives, unlike the female narratives, have the main character win his freedom with a physical confrontation with his master which becomes public and there is a declaration of fight to be free.

Another difference is seen in the strategies used to fight. Men are observed to run away as solitary heroes unlike women who enact flights as a result of their efforts and the cooperation of an entire community. The issue of motherhood is believed to prevent slave women from escaping as often as the slave men. She concludes that the life of a runaway slave woman is not a successful journey of an independent hero. Rather, it is an accomplishment by the whole community. I agree with Nardi about the issue of flights amongst male slaves and female slaves in that the issue regarding motherhood is a very important topic which prevents women from escaping from slavery as seen with Sethe in Morrison's *Beloved* and Linda in Harriet's *Incidents*. These women, for instance, who involve the community in ensuring their escape as well as that of their children are successful. Linking these flights in slavery to my work, I note that the flights by Sethe and Linda are prompted as a result of the fear of losing their children and as rightly stated by Nardi, they had the backing and encouragement of the community through various ways and means.

Still discussing slave narratives, Kouwenhoven (2015) has similar views to that of Nardi. Kouwenhoven looks at Frederick Douglass' *Narrative*

of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave (1845), and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861) as antebellum autobiographical slave narratives and compares how they represent the experiences and agency of slaves. She argues that these books' representation of slavery and agency is influenced by gender construction and expectations in white society at that period.

Kouwenhoven finds that the agency of Jacobs is different from that of Douglass and Northup in that whereas Northup and Douglass engage in a physical fight with their masters when attacked, Jacobs resists the advances from her master by hiding from him. She also asserts that one of the differences between Jacobs's narrative and that of Douglass's is the individualistic nature of Douglass's. She concludes that Jacobs's gender and dominant white culture affected her representation of her agency "but her narrative nonetheless demonstrates that she had some agency over her life, both before and after her escape." (p.14).

Kouwenhaven purports there is the indirect nature of narrating some events and agency by Douglass and Jacobs and asserts, "Douglass's and Jacobs' narratives are a product of theirs and their representation of agency is influenced by the dominant notion of gender in White society at the time." (p.14). Kouwenhaven's paper buttresses that of Nardi (2014) in making distinctive differences between female slave narratives and male slave narratives based on gender construction and expectations.

Bosnicova (2004) also makes a comparison between male and female slave narratives in "Lonely Fighters and Communal Talkers: A Comparative Analysis of Male and Female Slave Narratives" as she employs *The*

Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equaino or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself (1789), *History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave, Related by Herself* (1831), *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave, Written by Himself (*1845) and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself* (1861).

Following the works of other scholars like Kouwenhaven (2015) and Nardi (2014), Bosnicova asserts that there is a clear cut difference between the male and female slave narratives. However, there are a few instances where Bosnicova disagrees with the other scholars. A typical example is Olaudah Equaino's work which stands apart from that of most male slave narratives. It is observed that Equiano does not resort to physical violence in order to defend himself. Instead, he uses the approach by the women slave narratives which employs verbal attack.

Bosnicova suggests that the description "of male slave characters as "solitary heroes" and female characters as "selves-in-relation" is not absolutely applicable" (p.131). I oppose Bosnicova's assertion since it is based on only one male slave narrative she analysed. I am of the view that just one male slave narrative cannot be enough to generalize male slave narratives. In my opinion, it is essential to have a few male slave narratives to draw such a conclusion. This opinion is based on the present study of motherhood in female slave narratives by the researcher using four novels to draw a conclusion on the idea and concept on motherhood and mothering during three different periods including slavery.

In dealing with issues regarding sexuality, Matthews and Reagan-Kendrick (2016) in "Raping the Jezebel Hypocrisy, Stereotyping and Sexual

Identity in Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*" attempt to use Harriet Jacobs' book to examine the origins of African-American female sexual scripts, particularly using the image of Jezebel and its consequences. They set out to explore relationships between female slaves and their masters and mistresses in Antebellum American South and link them to the sexual stereotypical negative ideas about black women slaves whilst linking them to the representation of a positive sexual identity for African-American women in the media in the United States. They are quick to add, "*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* while attempting to convey the general indignities and cruelties of slavery, truly resonates with readers as an account of the sexual coercion, corruption, and violence enacted upon black female bodies as representative symbols of their masters' unchecked lust" (p.2).

Matthews and Reagan-Kendrick assert that Jacobs in her writing recounts on behalf of other slave women, the impossible situations with their masters they found themselves in. These scholars describe the Jezebel type of character which they claim is important to Linda Brent's portrayal in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl.* To Matthews and Reagan-Kendrick therefore, the book opens the floodgate for various sexual maneuvers. Matthews and Reagan-Kendrick conclude:

> By representing the black female slave as a being with the ability to seduce, manipulate, to toy with the affections of these men who already own her and may do with her what they like, those subscribing to the stereotype of the Jezebel blame black women for their position as slaves and a perceived moral degradation for receiving that which is forced upon them against their will. (p.11).

This idea of sexuality is further discussed in "The Strangest Freaks of Despotism": Queer Sexuality in Antebellum African American Slave

Narratives", by Abdur-Rahman (2006), who employs Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* in analyzing the interrelation of sexuality, race, identity, and social order. She argues that racial slavery was a means and the linkage to homosexuality, a belief held by the Europeans. She uses Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* to explore the "historical and representational processes by which slaves came to embody various forms of sexual deviance" (p.225). She concludes that both Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* "expose the grand contradiction of the simultaneity of European Enlightenment and modernization and the base, barbaric social and labor systems that were imported from antiquity to support economic growth and (white) identity formation in the New World" (p.234).

In diverting from sexuality, O'Neill (2018) explores the use of imagination in actualizing a vision of social justice. She refers to some neo-slave narratives like Octavia Butler's *Kindred*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and Nalo Hopkins's *Sister Mine*. She points to the fact that all these writings can be unified under a genre called Visionary Fiction, a term coined by Walidah Imarisha to describe "the compilation of speculative and science fiction stories by social justice organizers" (p.57). She argues that Harriet Jacob's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is a radical reimagining of the past and present, a feature of visionary fiction. She classifies *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* as Visionary (Non) Fiction. She focuses on Harriet's stay at the garret and her vivid description of the place and concludes that "the effort of surviving the

garret, escaping the garret and writing the garret is an act of visionary (non) fiction" (p.66).

This section of the review has focused on essays written on Harriet Jacobs' *The Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* which includes language, slavery and christianity, issues on slave narratives as well as sexuality in an attempt to enable the researcher to situate her analysis better in the ongoing scholarship on the novel. These reviews present a broader spectrum which this research will employ for analysis.

Reviews on Walker's *The Color Purple*

Thyreen (1999) opines that Walker's *The Color Purple* has not been given much exposure from the spiritual aspect by critics because of the theological elements which deal intricately with the material, physical and bodily reality of black women of the South in the first half of the 20th century. The novel is also based on the ideas of feminism, womanism, amongst others (p.49). *The Color Purple,* according to Thyreen, sets out to redefine God from a patriarchal notion to a spirit that must be claimed within one's self and in nature to draw the conclusion that God is neither oppressive nor domineering, not to talk of being harmful to the individual or the community.

She sets out to examine or analyse the theological critique in the novel which describes issues of material, social, physical, spiritual bondage and oppression resulting from systems of belief. She believes that the notion held by the characters in the novel concerning God as an "old white grandfather with a totalitarian authority", will automatically bring out a society that is "patriarchal male supremacist" (p.50). Walker's novel brings to fore the misconceptions of God which affect the material world. Thyreen asserts that

the identity of God is reduced to a being identified with oppressive white patriarchy hence the reason why Celie addresses her letters to God because she is ashamed of speaking directly to Him. I disagree with Thyreen's interpretation of Celie's reason for writing to God. I am of the view that Celie writes to God not because she is ashamed, but because she seeks solace as well as companionship with God.

To conclude, therefore, Thyreen expresses the view that the novel *The Color Purple* abandons the notion of a fixed, patriarchal God for a more liberal one which recognizes the Divine in every creation and which claims the spirit within the individual. To the effect of God being liberal, I absolutely agree and wish to state that both Walker's *Color Purple* and Wilson's *Our Nig* portray such attributes of God. This portrayal brings to light the issue of religion as a tool of comfort which is discussed in the analysis of this research.

Faurar (2011) in her work "Negotiating space and identity in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*" explores the relationship between identity and location in the novel and asserts that the house where Celie resides is a place of hostility, hatred and violence which confines her instead of offering comfort (p.491). Both her childhood house and her marital house offer no form of comfort or escape for her. They are rather places of abuse which interrupt her intimate spatial domains. Faurar argues that the idea of (re)locations have very strong repercussions on Celie's identity which result in the changes in character. There is also the idea of fantasy space exhibited by Celie towards Shug Avery in her pictures. This fantasy space later becomes a series of spatial movements towards self-actualisation. To summarise Faurar, I quote:

> The interrelation between the individual and the whim of locations Celie is subjected to is meaningful in the sense that the

> spaces that Celie occupies have the power to bring about redemption. Therefore, the spaces she experiences, either domestic, spiritual or indulged in fantasies, although eliciting inhumane experiences, they also represent an essential means to convey the engulfing element of transformation which integrates physical healing and spiritual salvation (p.494).

In digressing from spaces and identities, there is the import of metaphors which have been discussed in "Symmetry as conceptual metaphor in Walker's *The Color Purple*" by Tapia (2003) who analyses three types of conceptual metaphor of embodied symmetry in *The Color Purple* which examines issues of race, non-traditional families, and gender roles. Tapia is of the opinion that the many unconventional elements found in the novel might lead to the conclusion as a bad or chaotic novel, the settings which run from continent to continent (American South to Africa) as well as the dialect of African-American vernacular English which is difficult to understand. According to Tapia, "we might find the epistolary structure of the novel tenuous, with its broad expanse of time and space, and its letters never reaching their recipients or arriving too late for reply" (p.30). The epistolary structure of the novel rather brings out the creativity of the writer as well as creates suspense in the reader. It also attempts to project a certain realism to the reader. Tapia argues that though the novel is described as chaotic, the reader's tacit familiarity with symmetry enables Walker to present these chaotic and abominable acts. She calls these "poles of conceptual symmetry." In Tapia's view, there are various projections of conceptual symmetry which falls in line with issues like race, gender and family.

In another vein, Priya K (2014) posits that the novel traces the life of Celie in revealing the violence faced by black women in the rural South during

the first half of the twentieth century in the form of economic, social and emotional crisis. Celie's relationship with her step-father and her husband all take the form of psychological and sexual oppression. Priya's stance is that Celie's "only confirmation of existence to herself is the letters initially written to God both in hope and hopelessness" (p.52). She is of the view that the perpetrators of violence in the novel are themselves victims of sexism and racism and concludes that the novel not only examines violence as a potential destabilizing agent of identity, subjectivity and selfhood, but also brings to attention the demarcation between the perpetrators, victims and observers blurred in the face of violence. Inarguably, the acts of violence in the novel present to readers the various inconsistencies in the life of a black woman.

Having discussed violence, I now turn attention to the import of emancipation. In "A study of Celie's emancipation in Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*", Padhi (2015) traces the life of Celie in the novel. She attests to the fact that Celie matures from a poor, black and illiterate African-American girl to an independent and financially stable woman through association with some women characters like Nettie, Sofia, and Avery Shug who reshape her in different ways. Celie is emancipated through these women characters who define solidarity between Black women living in the era where racism is a common canker.

This section of the review has focused on essays written on Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* which include religion, space and identity, violence, and emancipation.

Reviews on Toni Morrison's *Beloved*

Zamalin (2014) in his article "Toni Morrison's *Beloved,* Racial Inequality and American Public Policy" argues that one implicit interpretation of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is the importance of giving recognition to how historical legacies of slavery have shaped the lives of African-Americans. He extricates *Beloved* from politics and public policies but affirms its literary position. He is, however, of the view that *Beloved* is a social assistance that reaffirms the African-American marginalization and offers insights that he calls "conditional social assistance" (p.206). This conditional social assistance is bonded to the legacy of slavery because it provides the obvious reason that African-Americans are indebted to the American society for the aid they receive due to the same social conditions created by slavery. This, according to him, makes Toni Morrison's *Beloved,* highly commendable in its observation of the relationship between public assistance programs and racial inequality in the United States.

Zamalin analyses the character Edward Bodwin in *Beloved* as one that Morrison uses to portray how conditional social assistance aggravates African-American marginalization. According to Zamalin, there is a linkage between Bodwin's assistance and his paternalistic attitude. To expatiate further, Zamalin is of the view that Bodwin's assistance is to aid recipients on the condition that they uphold some form of moral standards of his own definition. He keeps the characters under his authority and labour in order for them to receive his assistance. Morrison uses Bodwin's aid to intensify the African-American economic marginalization in the life of the African-American.

He further argues that Bodwin's aid can be described as fundamentally tenuous and unreliable because of the high regard and power he uses in defining moral standards and his belief of the African-Americans as inferior. Zamalin argues further that Sethe's attempt to stab Bodwin at the end of the novel is an indication of Sethe's fear of Bodwin coming to take Denver away to work for him. I disagree with the assertion as I am of the view that Sethe's attempt to stab Bodwin might be because metaphorically, Bodwin is ascertained to be representational of the dangers of social assistance. Perhaps Sethe's action is as a result of Morrison attempt to destroy social assistance in her own way.

Zamalin (2014) essentially believes *Beloved* is Morrison's idea of subtly criticizing Bodwin's mode of assistance and presenting to the reader an alternative through the black women in the novel. He argues that Baby Suggs's behavior or way of caring, for instance, should be replicated as a model for social assistance. The Black women supported Denver through different means with not only basic needs, but also emotional support. He concludes that though *Beloved* does not make any direct argument with regards to public policies and how they can facilitate racial justice, the novel is insightful with regards to understanding and instructing the various possibilities and models of social assistance. I believe that the social assistance given by Bodwin, a white man, differs from the assistance given by the Black women because of the marginalized positions they find themselves. Bodwin cannot offer emotional support like the women because he is a male and he cannot understand Denver as much as the Black women like Denver herself. Social assistance therefore is given based on who and where a person finds

himself or herself. In other words, the idea behind social assistance centres on the people who need the assistance and these people are mostly the blacks who are seen as the lower class of people.

Another issue related to Blacks is evident in the article "History, Trauma and Narrative in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* in Relation to "Black Lives Matter", Younes (2016) attempts to narrate how Morrison's *Beloved* and a contemporary social movement known as "Black Lives Matter" (BLM) depict African-American traumas. He argues that the bodies of slaves inscribed by the Whiteman have both physical and metaphorical significances. In juxtaposing Morrison's *Beloved* and BLM, Younes makes a clear distinction between the novel and the contemporary social movement. He believes they all have the same aim of bringing to the fore or narrating African-American traumas through the use of different modes of narrative. He concludes that "BLM" is a continuity to *Beloved* and that though the narrative technique of BLM differs from that depicted in *Beloved*, they both attest to the fact that African-American traumas are not new issues, but a continuous process suffered over time. The current dimension of BLM, though different in focus, can still be juxtaposed with *Beloved* just as Younes has asserted. This current dimension which was aggravated as a result of the killing of a black man by a white police officer buttresses the previous grievances of the Black people concerning their safety and issues of racism meted out against them.

In discussing the system of assistance amongst the African-American community, Duran (1994) argues that there is some form of intimate connection of the black individual to the community and this is axiomatically displayed in Toni Morrison's literary works. Duran mentions the family

relations in the novel as projected by various characters which become a form of survival for them. She mentions Sethe, Paul D, and Denver as examples of such characters.

She argues that the past and the dead cannot exist without the present, and, therefore, there is the need or importance of the idea of looking back to the past (p.13). She is of the view that "*Beloved* is presented as an instrument to confront the ghosts from the past" (p.13). Duran explains that Morrison's characters are freed from the burden of their past and they are made to feel what they should themselves feel, which to her, is love (p.14). In sum, she reinforces Morrison's claim that the community plays a role in the understanding of human existence especially in the area of strong sense of belonging, caring and sharing helps to reactivate the present and this can only be achieved through "re-working and revising the old system based on the ideals of love and trust" (p.17). I am of a similar view by Duran that the Black community is united and supportive of one another and that the community plays a very vital role in shaping and influencing the characters found in the novel.

Marianne Hirsch (1996) in her work "Maternity and Rememory: Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" moves away from the issues of Black communities in her view that Morrison's *Beloved* can help scholars to portray how difficult defining a particular terminology has become these days as hegemonic familial mythos is still upheld in the society. Hirsch argues that defining motherhood should come from different aspects including personal, subjective, legal, psychological, biological, economic, historical and technological points. She argues that this kind of definition is a difficult one

because maternity cannot be studied from the perspectives of mothers if perspectives in theories define subjectivity from the point of view of the developing child instead of the perspective of mothers. I totally agree that the issue of definitions should be the work of the person or people in charge of the terminology. The definition of motherhood should be from the point of view of the women who are called mothers and not children who are being mothered. This definition should be from the one offering her services as a mother and not the one being offered the services as a child. Though this point of view may be contestable, I do not totally repudiate other views but insist that only the ones experiencing a particular phenomenon can define it best. Breaking away from definitions and dealing with superstition and beliefs amongst the African-Americans, Deyab (2016) in his article, "Cultural Hauntings in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" expresses the view that Toni Morrison is amongst African-American women who employ ghosts as tools to reconnect and recover the past in unconventional ways. He observes that Morrison's *Beloved* uses a ghost as an expression to recollect her cultural heritage. There is also the idea of magic realism by Morrison which, Deyab argues, is to give some kind of balance to reality and fantasy.

According to Deyab, there is a relationship between the ghost Beloved and the characters Sethe, Paul D and Denver. The ghost does not only have an effect on the other characters, it has an effect on or relationship to the African-American community. He concludes that Morrison's use of Beloved's ghost is an act to retell the history of slavery in order for the African-American to embrace it and overcome it. The idea of ghosts is popular amongst both Africans and African-Americans. It is not novel when Morrison uses a ghost

character to bring out the importance of the belief in the existence of ghosts in the African-American community.

Ramzi and Jamali (2012) also discuss the belief in magic in "Magic(al) Realism as Postcolonial Device in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" as they attempt to explore magical realism's decolonizing role in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*. They stress that oppressed writers like Morrison adopted magical realism as a counter to the dominant American culture. They posit that *Beloved* was written purposively to describe the point of view of African-Americans who are socially and politically powerless. They describe magic realism in the Postcolonial terminology as a server of "the transformative decolonizing project of imaging alternative histories" (p.112). They refer to *Beloved* as a postcolonial intervention, which recentres the American history in the lives of African-Americans who are dispossessed. They also opine that Morrison employs African-American oral culture in recovering black historical experiences.

In sum, they find that Toni Morrison employs magical realism which becomes an umbrella for identity, history, and future possibilities and that the novel is a distortion and a transgression of the Eurocentric idea of the conception of reality. This article, in my opinion, transgresses the beliefs of the African-Americans in ghosts, magic and superstitions. It should be noted that African-American spirituality cannot be classified as magic, superstitions, etc.

It is of essence, therefore, to restate that these reviews are important to this study because they cover a large range of issues and beliefs of the African-Americans of which motherhood is an aspect. The aspect of

motherhood which brings into contestation the status quo as well as the ambivalence of the term is what this thesis seeks to address.

Page (1992), in "Circularity in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*", discusses the idea of circles and circle metaphors and both their implicit and explicit circles and how they demonstrate subtle relationships between the novel's content and its form. He mentions one of the circles as the black neighbourhood around 124 Bluestone where there seems to be peace, unity and happiness at one time, and dejection at another. He refers to this community circle as one which is "two-edged: supportive and necessary, yet divisive and petty" (p.32).

He considers family as another circle. Some of the characters like Sethe and Baby Suggs lost their families and Sethe, for instance, tried to regain her family back. Others like Paul D in their wanderings met families. Denver attempted to leave her family whilst Beloved, on the other hand, returns and there is a clamour for intimacy in 124 Bluestone. This particular circle became "too intense and self-contained" (p.33) and, therefore, they become isolated from the community.

There is also the circle images which Page describes come in different forms through Denver's circular bower (a five boxwood bushes, planted in a ring) as a metaphor of safe haven and a womb, Beloved's "circle around the neck" of a woman becomes "the iron circle …around our neck" (p.34). Page connects the idea of circularity to that of oral tradition which has a link with African folklore. He juxtaposes *Beloved*'s circling, spiraling, and digressive narrative patterns with that of African folk narratives which are built on repetitions of words, phrases, motifs as well as stock situations and stock

episodes. Page concludes that it is only through telling and retelling the past through circling the horrible and the shameful, that healing comes to some of the characters like Sethe and Paul D.

This section of the review has focused on essays written on Toni Morrison's *Beloved* which include racial inequality, history and trauma as well as community and love in an attempt to enable the researcher to situate her analysis better in the scholarship on the novel.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on the various scholarly reviews on the four books employed in this research as well as a summary of the women authors. The chapter also focused on the historical background of African-American women writers.

CHAPTER THREE

MOTHERHOOD AND MOTHERING: A CONCEPTUAL DISCUSSION

Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed scholarly articles which highlighted the historical background of African-American women writers, summary of the women authors and their texts being used as well as reviews on the texts used. This part of the thesis reviews studies on mothering and motherhood by various scholars. Particular attention will be paid to Reyes (2002) and O'Reilly (1993) as their works are focused and situated within the confines of the African-American mother. Furthermore, the works of Reyes and O'Reilly are mostly based on African-American women writings and their portrayal of the African-American mother.

Concept of Motherhood

A discussion on mothering and motherhood from a theoretical perspective cannot be confined to only the area of literary studies and literary theory, given the fact that the two concepts have received considerable attention from scholars working in several disciplines. For instance, O'Reilly (2006) in giving a historical overview of thinking on mothering and motherhood from a feminist perspective notes that the interest in the two concepts goes as far back as the 1960s. The central concern of feminist thinkers and researchers of mothering and motherhood has been the "oppressive and empowering aspects of maternity, and the complex relationship between the two" (p. 323).

In order that the above stated concern about mothering and motherhood within feminist thought is explored to its fullest, theorists within the field have recognised that there is the need to clearly delineate motherhood and mothering as two related and yet different concepts. In this regard, O'Reilly (2006) argues, "[T]he term motherhood refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood which is male-defined and controlled and is deeply oppressive to women" (p.325). From this understanding of the concept of motherhood, it is obvious that motherhood is not experienced individually by the woman. The concept rather focuses on motherhood as an institution that has evolved and been shaped by predominantly patriarchal societies. This history of evolution, especially the fact of the shaping influence of patriarchal societies, has been pointed to as the source of oppressive dimensions of motherhood as an institution.

The association of motherhood with patriarchy and the oppression of the woman that the institution represents has been argued as an underlying concern of female authors in American and African-American literature in general and of the prose of Toni Morrison in particular (Ghasemi and Hajizadeh). Ghasemi and Hajizadeh (2013) point out that Morrison's depiction of mothers is often essentially a questioning of "the social construction of matriarchy and maternity which often fails to perceive the identity and individuality of a mother apart from her child" (p.477). In this sense, Morrison's fiction constitutes a challenge to the often-idealised construct of motherhood available not only in literature but in society as a whole. But within the context of African-American literary history and culture, her fictions' challenge of the idealised portrayal of motherhood also amounts to

the filling of historical gaps (Rody). In discussing Morrison's *Beloved,* Rody (1995) observes that the novel is a historical novel that rewrites the story of a historical figure and adds that the text is a politically engaged novel of "extraordinary psychological reach" (p.94). Rody (1995) observes that the novel is a historical novel that rewrites the story of a historical figure and adds that the text is a politically engaged novel of "extraordinary psychological reach" (p. 94).

What ought to be explored further in regard to the observations made about Morrison's attempts to re-write history through her novels within the context of this discussion on motherhood and mothering is why authors such as Morrison find it necessary to rewrite history and to re-construct motherhood. Part of the answer again lies in the argument that, literary history in general and American literary history in particular has constructed motherhood in ways that refuse to acknowledge the defining influence of the history of slavery on the evolution of motherhood in African American culture. The effect of this refusal to acknowledge this history and its impact on motherhood has been a portrayal of motherhood. Motherhood that is not only idealised but fantasised. This depiction, therefore, results in a masking of motherhood and a masking of the oppressive implications of motherhood for the mother in particular and women as a whole. Morrison's rewriting of history through her fiction is, therefore, a bold attempt to shatter that debilitating perfect construct of motherhood and to bring to the fore the real, yet difficult to confront institution of motherhood.

An important dimension of the institution of motherhood which Ghasemi and Hajizadeh (2013) observe in Morrison's fiction as

confrontational is the lack of delineation of mother and the child within the institutional construct of motherhood. It would appear that the institution of motherhood is one that is constructed around childbearing and child-rearing. To this extent, motherhood is not necessarily about the mother but rather is focused on how the female is a useful instrument in ensuring social continuity. Motherhood in this sense is constructed as an instrumentalist identity for the mother, one which eschews the nuanced and individuated identity of every woman and every mother. This is one way through which the institution of motherhood oppresses and disempowers the mother. It is the context of this understanding of motherhood that scholars such as O'Reilly (2006) have called for a "mother-centred" construct of motherhood. A mother-centred construct of motherhood will ensure that agency is ascribed to the mother. It is through this ascription of agency that the mother is empowered through motherhood. O'Reilly (2006) also further argues that a mother-centred construct of motherhood must proceed by rejecting the kind of rationalisation of the empowerment of women, through motherhood in which the thesis is that empowered mothers will be beneficial to childbearing and childrearing. What ought to be highlighted instead, she argues, is the empowerment of mothers for the sake of empowering mothers. The argument and advocacy for the empowerment of women should, therefore, be seen "as a strategy for more effective parenting" (p. 327).

This argument about mother empowerment through motherhood is theoretically enticing. However, theoretical purity in this instance will have to be weighed against real-world implications arising from such a worldview. It is easy to see how advocating a mother-centred conceptualisation of

motherhood as a counter to the prevalent child-centred conceptualisation will be received with hostility not just by society as a whole but by a cross-section of mothers across different societies and cultures. For instance in a paper on the discourses of motherhood and mothering among the Shona and Ndebele, Muwati, Gambahaya, and Gwekwerere (2011) demonstrate how women in these two cultures of Africa construct their identities on a child-centred conceptualisation of motherhood. The extent to which a mother-centred theoretical conceptualisation of motherhood will take root in the practical everyday lives of mothers is dubious and at least questionable. It is not, therefore, surprising that O'Reilly (2006) herself admits, "there are few examples in either life or literature" of the kind of empowered motherhood that she is advocating.

Concept of Mothering

Having dwelt so far on the concept of motherhood, it is now important to shift attention towards the concept of mothering. Whereas motherhood is viewed as a male-defined site of oppression(O'Reilly), mothering is used to refer to "women's experiences of mothering which are female-defined and centred and potentially empowering to women" (O'Reilly, 2006, p. 325). The first point that needs to be elaborated from this characterisation of mothering is that it dwells on the individual personal experiences of mothers. Even at the definitional level therefore mothering is positioned as a foil to motherhood in the sense that its focus on the experiences of women means that it is empowering these experiences and by extension the women who are the experiencers of those experiences. Also, the fact that its definition hinges on the experiences of the mother means that there is no chance of it being defined

from male perspectives. The apparent male-defined nature of motherhood which is the source of its oppressive nature is, therefore, removed by the nature of mothering itself.

It is the case from the definition of mothering presented above that the concept ascribes agency to the mother. It is in fact the case that the idea of mother agency is one that is at the core of the concept of mothering. Part of the explanation of this centrality is that although it is the case that motherhood and mothering are key issues in a variety of disciplines such as literature, philosophy, political theory, sociology and anthropology; and social science and cultural theory (Chodorow), the two concepts have been largely influenced and dominated by feminist constructionism (Arendell). Within feminist constructionism, "mothering and motherhood are viewed as dynamic social interactions and relationships, located in a societal context organized by gender and in accord with the prevailing gender belief system" (Arendell, 2000, p. 1193).

An important point within this feminist constructionist understanding of motherhood and mothering is its cultural as well as social relativity. The dialectics that is admitted to exist between mothering, motherhood and societal context is an admission of the fact that the historical context of societies is bound to define not only the institution of motherhood but also the experiences of mothering. This admission takes us back to the nature of the depiction of female characters in Toni Morrison's prose, especially, in terms of its clear rejection of the idealised portrayal of the mother and motherhood. An idealised portrayal that is admittedly not in consonance with the African-American mother's experience of slavery and how that experience has been

the shaping force behind her experience of motherhood and mothering. In a study of Morrison's *God Help the Child,* López Ramírez (2015) notes the extent to which both the patriarchal institution of motherhood and mothering in this novel attempts to explore the extent to which the institution itself and the African-American's experiences of mothering have been shaped by "diverse factors, such as the legacy of slavery and its survival strategies, low-income and/or single-parent households and the disruption of the motherline" (p. 107). What such observations do reveal is that both the institution of motherhood and the mother's exclusive experience of mothering are culturally and historically specific.

In fiction that is political such as the prose of Morrison, it cannot be surprising that the writer through her text will be bent on reconstructing motherhood and mothering, in order to situate mothering and motherhood within its proper historical context. This argument then brings us back to the conclusion arrived at by Rody (1995) who insists that the role that Morrison saw for herself as an African-American female writer was to portray motherhood and mothering in a way that did not merely acknowledge African-America history and the extent to which that history has shaped and defined mothering and motherhood for the African-American mother but to express it as well. This role is, therefore, one that allows the writer, in this case Morrison, to help bring to the fore a history that has seldom been acknowledged in literature.

Motherhood and Mothering in African-American history

Given that I have already argued that a fundamental difference between motherhood and mothering is that the latter is by definition

empowering of women in general and of mothers in particular, a question that will naturally arise is: in what ways is the portrayal of mothering and motherhood in a way that highlights the extent to which the two have been shaped by African-American history, especially its history of slavery empowering of the African-American mother? To begin to answer this question, I deem it necessary to examine a point made by López Ramírez (2015):

> Morrison challenges the stereotypes of the black female, such as the conventional black matriarchal figures, protective and powerful, whose selflessness equates them to their nurturing qualities and annihilates the identity of the mother as an individual, properties that have traditionally been assigned to black women to justify their oppression and submission (p. 108).

The point made above is that, by returning to history to explore the extent to which history has shaped the mothering experiences of the African American woman, Morrison is able to subvert the unrealistic image of the mother and construction of mothering. As Ghasemi and Hajizadeh (2012) have indicated, "Black maternity has culturally and historically been mythologized and black mothers stereotyped" (p. 477). This mythologization and stereotyping has led to the writing-out of the black mother as an individual being with a unique identity. That is to say that within literature and, in fact, society, the black mother is taken to be a homogenous entity lacking in individual personality. There is a lack of diversity in the portrayal of the black mother. The image of the black mother that endures from this mythologization is that of the matriarchal figure "superbly strong and protective, and at the same time, selfless, all embracing, demanding nothing or little, and totally self-sacrificing creatures whose identities are inseparable from their nurturing services" (p. 477).

Clearly, this depiction of the black mother in literature has no antecedent in history, particularly African American history. Yet, it is this portrayal that is clearly dominant in literature as well as in society as a whole. Part of the reason for this dominance is that a patriarchal social system has defined motherhood and mothering in ways that are self-serving of such a social system. The second part of the reason accounting for the dominance of this mythic construction of the black mother is that the history of literature in general and of African American literature in particular can be rightly viewed as an artistic form that has been used to construct a quasi-history of the mother. This quasi-history of the mother is one that is not based in fact but based on the patriarchal society's projection and vision of what the mother is or should be. It is this quasi-historical account of the black mother that Morrison challenges in her work.

Her work allows her to challenge the dominant vision of mothering as it exists and simultaneously construct an alternative vision of motherhood and mothering. This is the reason for which Morrison has been rightly described as a revisionist (Ghasemi&Hajizadeh, 2012). This reconstruction of mothering which is based on the actual history of slavery allows mothering to be understood outside of the idealized version and its oppressive expectations of the African American mother. Further, the reconstruction allows Morrison to present an idea of mothering and motherhood that runs counter to the Western cultural construction of the two concepts (Ghasemi&Hajizadeh; López Ramírez).

This is one of the reasons for which Morrison's depiction of mothering and motherhood is empowering of not just the African-American mother but

of mothers as a whole. Her depiction presents an alternative vision of mothering. Such an alternative vision implies the availability of choice for the individual mother. Choice implies then that the individual mother has control in terms of what they want their experiences of motherhood to be. Her historicized fiction in its entirety therefore comes to constitute a process for the validation of alternative experiences of motherhood. This validation of alternative experiences also becomes a process of empowering the black mother because she is no longer confined to an apparently single story of mothering and motherhood. In this way, Morrison's fiction theorizes mothering and motherhood in ways that are empowering of the black mother in particular and subversive of the Western construction of mothering and motherhood as well. Further, it is essential to note the stance of other scholars like Reyes who introduces other concepts related to the construction of mothering and motherhood.

Reyes (2002) discusses the concept of "mother-women" as:

> "mother-women" are those who, among many good attributes, are seen as angels. Therefore, the idea of mother-women is attested to when it comes to the New World. Reyes' attempt is to transform and decolonise the representation of mothering (8). For her, apart from the concept of mothering being seen to care for the "mind, body, intellect and cultures of ourselves, as well as extend kinship of community, there is another aspect or kind of mothering "that devours and destroys" (9). She argues that mothering women "represent the womanism of wholeness and the vast possibilities for the once-colonised to achieve victory through self-affirmation (p. 9).

Reyes' work centres on the concept of mothering-women in discussing transcultural and trans-historical mothering themes in novels by Toni Morrison (United States), Jean Rhys (Dominica/England), Simone Schwarz-Bart (Guadelope), and Mariama Ba (Senegal). Her work focuses on how these

female writers discuss their experiences with regard to history, race, ethnicity, class, generation differences and gender. Accordingly, she finds that writers such as Toni Morrison, Simone Schwarz-Bart and Alice Walker are among contemporary writers who confirm the diversity of women's mothering. This confirmation justifies, for instance, my selection of Toni Morrison and Alice Walker among the African-American women writers for the present study. These writers' redefinitions of the word 'mothering' give an insight into the emotions and ideas embedded in the African-American woman. Mothering to the African-American woman is imbued with so many different extensions which Reyes describes as diversity. This makes the mothering phenomenon a unique one amongst the African-Americans.

Reyes asserts that slave narratives written by men are mostly about obtaining freedom and escape whilst those of women concentrate on their roles as mothers and protectors of their children. She, however, finds the role of the grandmother in the narratives such as *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* as very fulfilling to the role of mothering (p.17), another affirmation on the extension of mothering. This is because of her assertion that the roles of the grandmothers in African-American novels including *Beloved* go beyond mere titles. These old women live up to their names "grand" "mother" as they perform, embark and tread on dangerous paths, all in their quest to make their grandchildren feel more secure and, in some instances, obtain their freedom from the perilous life of slavery and its aftermath. She concludes by asserting that women's personal narratives which have the autobiographical 'I', may also be seen as

autobiographical 'we'. She observes that women have memories which are both distant and belonging.

In Reyes' other article, "Taking Flight and Taking Foot: From Margaret Garner to *Beloved*", she recounts the story of a group of African slaves in the year 1803 who took flight or walked on water back home from Dunbar Creek in Georgia. She concentrates on the concepts "to take flight" and "to take foot". In her opinion, both concepts implied returning home to Africa, and had symbolic implications of moving from slavery to political freedom. Reyes argues that "to fly" was a euphemism for suicide during the days of slavery; it was a private transcript for covering up sudden escape and denying any resistance that took the form of self-chosen death. It meant leaving one kind of material existence, the life that is known, and crossing the river over to the next world of the spirit. The transcript was privately and publicly "hidden in plain view." In all ontological systems, death was not finality, it was another beginning" (p.40). This brings into view one of the continuities between the African and the African-American, the belief in reincarnation which claims that there is more to afterlife than death. She supports the argument by Monica Schuler that "the flying African not only implied suicide but also sudden and inexplicable disappearances of slaves by taking foot and taking flight." (p.41).

Reyes makes a correlation between her definition of taking flight, being, suicide and Toni Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon* where Mr. Robert Smith commits suicide with the note of flying away on his own wings. Reyes connects Morrison's characters in her novels as significant to the concepts of flight, discovery and recovery. She argues that Morrison's *Beloved* focuses on

slaves and how taking flight and foot are a necessary aspect or experience of slavery. She links Margaret Garner to the character Sethe in *Beloved*, and is of the view that:

> Morrison's depiction of the Garner story in *Beloved* constructs meaning out of the emancipation era consciousness in and across historical time and place; it is not only about slavery but also about the inner lives of the once-enslaved people. While *Beloved* brings Margaret Garner back into memory and knowledge, a re-reading and reconstruction of the Garner infanticide challenges previously conceived and simplified images about nineteenth-century African-American mother-women in slavery. (p.56).

In my opinion, the Margaret Garner story is one of the most horrific stories about a slave woman's quest to save her children recorded in the history of America. The story adopted and adapted by Morrison gives readers the opportunity to relive the whole incident once again and not to condemn the action taken by Sethe in the heat of the period.

This stance taken by Sethe in *Beloved* can be said to be one representational disposition by a mother in the African-American society. It should be noted that there are other several dispositions taken and another of these is taken by Linda in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs. Reyes describes Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* as a representation an enslaved woman projects in the forefront of the nineteenth-century awareness that embraces kinship and black womanhood. She further describes the character Beloved as symbolising "every African woman whose story will never be told. She is the haunting symbol of the many Beloveds-generations of mothers and daughters –hunted down and stolen from Africa; as such she is, unlike mortals, invulnerable to barriers of time, space, and place" (qtd from Deborah Horvitz- p. 157).

Reyes stresses that there is a strong association between Margaret Garner and the character Sethe in that Sethe attempts to explain or give plausible reasons for the choices slave mothers had to make. Reyes concludes that on one hand "the child-woman named Beloved evokes the mythmaking elements of the narrative. On the other hand, she is a necessary spiritual messenger and historical reminder, but not so much about the wrongs of a people or the pain of their transcripts. More significantly, she is that vital connection to the past that the people need in order to navigate the present" (p.76). Reyes further emphasises that Margaret Garner, in taking foot and flight, becomes the symbol of hope for the mother-women and their kinships and that her memory lives on. Though unable to escape slavery, her struggle will be projected from generation to generation and new ways of taking flight and foot would emerge.

O'Reilly (1993) in her book, *Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, writes on the topic, "A Politics of the Heart: Toni Morrison's Theory of Motherhood as a Site of Power and Motherwork, concerned with the empowerment of children". She discusses Morrison as a writer who displays a vast interest in different aspects pertaining to motherhood or theory on African-American mothering. She describes Morrison's theory of motherhood as "A politics of the heart" (p.1). O'Reilly adopts Patricia Collins' standpoint theory as a framework for analysing Morrison as a maternal theorist. According to Collins, Morrison adopts the core themes of black motherhood and adapts them to form a new form of black motherhood consciousness. This consciousness sets out to empower the African-American woman and to challenge the controlling images of black

motherhood defined by Collins as the "mammy"," matriarch", "Jezebel" and the "welfare mother "(p.3).

O'Reilly argues that there is a unique African-American tradition of motherhood which is characterised by two different but related themes. These are that mothers and motherhood are valued and central to the African-American culture. Secondly, mothers and mothering are responsible for the physical and psychological well-being and empowerment of the African-American people and the African-American culture as a whole. According to O'Reilly, the African-American culture understands the gravity of mothering, hence the power allotted to mothers by the society to enable them in their work of mothering. The African-American community essentially sees motherhood as a site of power for black women as it focuses on empowering children.

O'Reilly (1993) also discusses the concept of 'othermothering' from different perspectives and argues that the practice is central to the African-American tradition of motherhood and is pivotal for the survival of the black people (p.6). She discusses community mothering as similar to othermothering and uses the two terms interchangeably. She describes it as "a cultural sustaining mechanism and as a mode of empowerment for black mothers" which has been documented in different studies (p.7). In her opinion, community mothering promotes different and diverse forms of social activism. She discusses matrifocality and quotes from Patricia Hill Collins three ways in which the African-American model of mothering differs from that of the Eurocentric model:

> First, the assumption that mothering occurs within the confines of a private, nuclear family household where the mother has

> almost total responsibility for child-rearing is less applicable to Black families. While the ideal of the cult of true womanhood has been held up to Black women for emulation, racial oppression has denied Black families sufficient resources to support private, nuclear family households. Second, strict sex-role segregation, with separate male and female spheres of influence within the family, has been less commonly found in African-American families than in White middle-class ones. Finally, the assumption that motherhood and economic dependency on men are linked and that to be a "good" mother one must stay at home, making motherhood a full-time "occupation," is similarly uncharacteristic of African-American families. (pp. 43–44).

She asserts that the African-American culture is a matrifocal one which emphasises the role of mothers and as such women's mothering is characterised by matrifocality. She expresses the view that:

> The matrifocal structure of black families with its emphasis on motherhood over wifedom and black women's roles as economic providers means that the wife role is less operative in the African-American community and that motherhood is a site of power for black women (p.10).

O'Reilly posits that the nurturance of a family is a form of resistance in African-American mothering and that makes it unique. She agrees with Collins who asserts that children learn how to identify and challenge racist practices and their heritage at home. Empowerment of children with regards to resistance and knowledge takes place in the home and is quite different from the traditional idea of mothering which focuses on the home as a politically neutral calling of mothers (p.11).

O'Reilly's final theme centres on 'motherline', which is the role black mothers play as cultural bearers and tradition keepers (p.11). She explains the term motherline in the African-American society to mean ancestral memory and traditional values of the African-American culture. Women are the

'holders' of the African-American culture as it is their duty to pass down these traditions from generation to generation through mothering.

In O'Reilly's view, contemporary African-American women's writings, amongst other themes, celebrate mothers as both mentors and role models and bring out the effect of the powers obtained by daughters from their mothers and motherline. She goes further to discuss the relationship between African-American mothers and sons as well. She observes the lacuna in literature by African-American women's fictional writings of mother-son relationship as compared to mother-daughter relationship. According to O'Reilly:

> The African-American tradition of motherhood – othermothering, matrifocality, social activism, providing a homeplace, and cultural bearing-gives mothers, motherhood, and the motherline power and prominence in the African-American culture. Mothers from this site of authority empower their children through the above five themes or tasks of African-American mothering; children in turn, secure this empowerment through connection with their mothers and motherline (p.18).

In her sub-section titled "Motherhood as a site of power in Morrison: the "ancient properties" and the "funk", in her collection of essays, Toni *Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, O'Reilly correlates the aforementioned 5 themes as the foundation for Morrison's theory of motherhood and as a site of agency and authority for black women. Morrison argues that these practices and beliefs when elaborated and refined as specific characteristics are called the ancient properties and the funk which together, make motherhood a site of power for black women (p.19).

In contrast to the Eurocentric context, which sees motherhood as an organised patriarchal institution, deeply oppressive to women, African-

American women like Morrison see motherhood as a site of liberation and self-realisation because it is taken from the everyday lives of black women where motherhood is a site of power for them. In my opinion, a typical reference to Eurocentric concept of mothering can be summed in Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialetic of Sex* (1970) who avers that patriarchy exploits women's biological capacity to reproduce as their essential weakness. The only way for women to break away from the oppression, she argues, is to use technological advances to free themselves from the burden of childbirth.

According to O'Reilly, Morrison uses the term "the ancient properties" to represent traditional conceptions of black womanhood. This is developed further with a concept she calls "ship and safe harbour; that is, to make a house and be on the job market and still be able to nurture the children" (p.21). O'Reilly argues that Morrison's use of the term "ancient properties", can be said to:

> Signify those black women who are cultural bearers and define themselves in connection with African-American culture and history, and who serve as ambassadors for their people, bringing the past to the present and keeping African-American culture in the community of black people. To have the ancient properties is to live life according to the ways of the foremothers; it is to define oneself according to the script of traditional black womanhood of being both ship and harbour (p.23)

Women characters in Morrison's fiction who do not embrace the ancient properties of ethnic cultural feminism but rather that of Anglo-American definitions of feminism are not "complete" or "full" of selves (p.24). O'Reilly argues that unlike "the ancient properties", elaborated by Morrison, she uses literary devices like metaphor, personification, and juxtaposition to indirectly discuss them. She describes Morrison's fiction as depicting a particular mode

of mothering concerned with the empowerment of children through connection with the African-American motherline. This, according to Morrison, is possible only when mothers model and mentor the funk (traditional black values) and ancient properties discussed above.

According to O'Reilly, Morrison criticises the traditional nuclear family which is structured as mother, father and biological children with the husband playing the role of the provider and the wife, the home nurturer. Morrison views the nuclear family as structured by both male dominance and "white" hegemonic values which consist of money, ownership and individualism instead of the traditional black values (funk) and traditional black womanhood (the ancient properties) (p.25). Morrison's stance is that the adoption of the nuclear family will emulate that of the white and this will jeopardise the assumed equality because the nuclear family is structured in patriarchy and male dominance because a woman cannot be a ship and a harbour in a patriarchal marriage which reduces the woman and assigns her to the reproductive realm "of the home" (p.25).

This stance by Morrison is very debatable in the context that even without applying the whites' idea of nuclear family, the black family is still mostly dominated by the man or father. The idea of equality is peripheral unless the household is manned solely by the woman in the absence of the man, which though ironical, is the belief. Also, in the context of slavery where the woman was advantaged over the man who kept charge of the children, the woman had the sole responsibility over the children. It is in such instances that it can be boldly concluded that the woman serves as a ship and harbour. In such instances, the woman has no other choice in the care and protection of

the children. O'Reilly coins a term "motherwork" to describe a model of Morrison's standpoint on black motherhood as a site of power and maternal practice. According to her, Morrison categorises her demands into 4 which include protecting children from racists and sexist culture, teaching children how to protect themselves in order to empower themselves to survive and resist racist and patriarchal culture in which they live, develop strong and authentic identities as black people, and healing.

Still following the works of Morrison, O'Reilly finds that Morrison challenges the accepted definition of the terminology 'motherhood'. To her:

> Motherhood is a cultural construction that varies with time and place; there is no one essential or universal experience of motherhood. However, these many and diverse meanings and experiences of mothering become marginalised and erased through the construction of an official definition of motherhood. Through a complex process of intersecting forces-economics, politics, cultural institutions- the dominant definitions of motherhood is codified as the official and only meaning of motherhood. Alternative meanings of mothering are marginalised and rendered illegitimate. The dominant definition of motherhood is able to suppress its own construction as an ideology and thus can neutralise its specific construction of motherhood as universal, real, natural maternal experience (p.29).

I totally agree with her idea and definition of motherhood as proposed by the society. There is no one definition which can be given to the phenomenon of being a mother. The variations in the concept of motherhood can only be defined or described by individuals who are themselves mothers in their own rights and who can describe the feelings and experiences associated with it. According to O'Reilly, Morrison's view of mothering is a political act with social and public connections and consequences. She challenges the view that

mothering is an individualised and private act which focuses on nurturing children, with little or no political import, social significance or cultural value.

With regard to Morrison's novels, O'Reilly posits that there are representations of women who embody the ancient properties of traditional black womanhood. She mentions other characters including Sethe as women who "could build a house and have some children… they are both ship and safe harbour at the same time" (p.41). Similarly, with empowerment, O'Reilly mentions women characters like Sethe, who became a cook, and those whose jobs though differed, did not in any way conflict with their duties of home and nurturance. O'Reilly is quick to add that Morrison's fictional characters contrast with that of her white counterparts in that:

> The struggle for Morrison's mothers is not how to balance work and family but rather how to fulfil the important tasks of motherwork in the face of racism and poverty. In Morrison's fiction, black mothers, despite the power of their maternal standpoint, must mother their children in a world hostile to them and often must battle to provide the preservation, nurturance and cultural bearing necessary for the empowerment of their children (p.42).

O'Reilly concludes that there is disparity in the idealised view of motherhood with regard to her theory as compared to that found in Morrison's fiction., she essentially sees that the promise of the power of mothers and motherhood as found or celebrated in Morrison's theory is not delivered in her fiction (p.46). She is of the view that:

> Morrison's novels as fiction, do not describe or prescribe how such motherwork is to be performed; rather, they portray mothers' despair at not being able to fulfil the essential tasks of motherwork and the inevitable suffering of children and the larger African-American culture in the absence of maternal preservation, nurturance, and cultural bearing (p.46).

O'Reilly's work "Ruptures of the motherline: Slavery, Migration and Assimilaton: *Song of Solomon, Beloved*", discusses how slavery, migration and assimilation represented as historical trauma is a part of a fractured African-American motherline. According to her, these three have impaired black women's ability to perform their maternal function. Assimilation, "often results in black families, particularly among the middle class, seeking to emulate the hegemonic script of family relations in which the husband is dominant and the woman subservient and submissive" (p.73). She exemplifies this theme through the character Ruth in *Song of Solomon*. Ruth plays the role of a submissive wife and endures the dominance of her husband without any protest whatsoever. She seeks solace and love which she is denied in her son, Macon Dead whom she breastfeeds even at the age of five.

The other theme she discusses is migration which, to her, causes a weakening or dissolution of the African-American motherline. Migration, she refers to, is very difficult as women move from the rural areas to the urban areas where the traditions/values of African-Americans are not properly sustained or upheld. The third theme or concept is that slavery separates families through sale. Slavery, according to O'Reilly, disrupted the motherline more than any other institution/theme. She mentions a central theme in Morrison's fiction as being emotional barrenness which to her emerges when the African-Americans decide to associate or realize the illusionary white bourgeois family (p.75). According to O'Reilly, motherhood to Morrison "means to mother in the ways of assimilation, while mothering, for Morrison, signifies mothering by way of the values-funk, ancient properties, and ancestral memory of the motherline" (p.81). O'Reilly purports that the

character Pilate in *Song of Solomon* celebrates the redemptive powers of mothering from the motherline or mothering against motherhood (p.82). O'Reilly discusses the themes of migration, assimilation and slavery through Morrison's characters; Sethe in *Beloved* (slavery), Ruth in *Song of Solomon* (Assimilation) and Hagar in *Song of Solomon* (migration). She argues that the historical trauma of motherline loss is represented through the character Beloved while the psychological trauma of loss is explored through the character Sethe. Beloved, according to O'Reilly, represents the motherline, its historical loss and return. Also, motherline which is occasioned by assimilation, migration and slavery as described in Morrison's novels, brings to fore the importance of it to female empowerment and in O'Reilly's assertion, these themes when severed, prevent women from engaging in the important task of cultural bearing and in effect, a strong and proud selfhood. In my opinion, there is also a refreshment in the new environment which serves as a fraction because in a new environment, the migration flourishes in ways that cannot be predicted.

In "Maternal Interventions: Resistance and Power: *The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon, Tar Baby, Beloved and Paradise*, O'Reilly focuses on how mothers seek to prevent motherline loss as well as psychological wounding through maternal power and the performance of maternal functions which include cultural bearing, preservation and nurturance. According to O'Reilly, mothering, when it serves as resistance is at a crossroads whether it is against white supremacy or patriarchal motherhood. This mothering opposes the traditional discourse which explains mothering as barely private and

emotional. To her, motherhood is regarded as being the cause of women's oppression in the patriarchal culture.

She attests Morrison's fiction to be affirmative and confirmative of the importance of motherwork by accounting for both personal and cultural suffering that happens in its absence. She further confirms that Morrison's novels reflect mothers who rage and despair due to racism and poverty and are unable to perform their roles of motherwork. She attests to the fact that Morrison uses a mother's desperate and sometimes heroic struggle to provide the three essentials: preservation, nurturance and cultural bearing for her children, if it means resorting to extreme measures like killing of their children, in Sethe's case, Beloved and in Eva's case, provide protection (p.118).

O'Reilly describes mothering for the black women to be about ensuring the physical survival of both their children and that of the black community. Food and shelter, building and sustaining safe neighbourhoods play very important roles in defining black women's motherwork and motherlove. She, however, stresses that standard discourses on motherhood currently define motherwork and motherlove solely as nurturance. I totally agree with O'Reilly's description about motherhood in the black community. There is the constant struggle by the Blacks to be accepted into the community at large which is not favourable to them in all aspects of their lives. The Black woman battles every day of her life to ensure that her children survive in such a place and feel all the love and care that comes along with being children. The 'standard discourse' which O'Reilly describes on motherhood pays no

attention to this struggle by the Black mothers and therefore defines aspects of motherhood only in accordance with nurturance.

Related to the idea with nurturance, I disagree and strongly opine that a more realistic approach to the definition of motherhood as well as all its branches be made to embrace all the different versions of motherhood. The concept of preservative love by Mrs. MacTeer (*Bluest Eye*) and Eva (*Sula)* to O'Reilly are not considered "good enough" mothering by others but to Morrison, preservative love is the only way black women can keep alive their children in a world which is hostile to their well-being. Preservative love is what keeps black women's motherwork. O'Reilly describes preservative love as a central theme in some of Morrison's novels like *Sula* and the *Bluest Eye*. She further emphasises the novel *Sula* redefines what motherlove is by foregrounding preservative love as a part of mothering. In my opinion, preservative love is not a way used by Black mothers. It is life in itself. That was the only form of life a mother could give her children because without this preservative love, the mother-children bond never existed.

O'Reilly posits that Morrison's *Beloved* puts in place how mothers, through nurturance, challenge the notion of cultural denial and disparagement of black motherlove. According to her, "In *Beloved*, maternal nurturance is situated as a political act that seeks to defy two different, although intersecting, ideologies. The first deems black children as non-subjects and the second defines slave mothers as breeders and so not mothers" (p.127). In O'Reilly's argument, *Beloved* speaks "the hitherto silenced maternal narrative of slave women" (p.127). She further elaborates that *Beloved* serves as a voice to slave women's stories of motherhood and creates a kind of alternative

discourse on black motherhood. O'Reilly stresses that Morrison reinterprets the notion of race and gender of the black woman which posits her as not-mother by asserting Sethe's subjectivity in her role as a mother.

She discusses Sethe (*Beloved*) and Harriet (*Incidents in the life of a slave girl*) as women who interpret their maternal love as a powerful empowering stance of resistance. Both characters prefer their children dead than watching them grow up in slavery. To quote O'Reilly:

> Readers who fault Sethe for excessive motherlove, emphasize that she must come to see her own Self as her "best thing." This argument points to a misreading of Morrison's maternal stance. First, it assumes that female subjectivity is divisible into a mother self and a non-mother self; further, it positions motherlove in opposition to self-love. According to Morrison's maternal standpoint, black women of the ancient properties are both "builders" and "nurturers": they are both ship and harbor, and inn and trail. As Sethe claims an identity as a mother, she is also a worker, first as a slave and later as a cook; she is never only a mother. Furthermore, as discussed in chapter 1, motherlove and self-love are equally important, particularly because through motherlove one obtains self-love. What interests Morrison is not the importance of one over the other but how the two are held in balance. (p. 138).

O'Reilly asserts that nurturance is a site of resistance against the commodification of African-American under slavery and its disruption of the African-American motherline. She asserts that Morrison's first six novels which concentrate on maternal failure of nurturance and abused children signify inability to mother. She labels opposition to patriarchal motherhood as "deviant" maternal nurturance as found in Ruth Dead's late nursing of Milkman in *Song of Solomon.* According to O'Reilly, Morrison's representation of maternal power which is backed by preservative love and maternal nurturance as resistance, are problematic (p.147). I find argumentative the issue of Morrison representing her maternal powers by

preservative love and maternal nurturance as being problematic because I consider Morrison as an African-American woman who understands the issues of Black maternal, hence her deliberate attempt to portray these issues at stake to the world through her writings. The term "deviant" is a far cry from the real issues at stake. The story of the slave Margaret Garner which has been adapted by Morrison in her novel *Beloved*, for instance, is not fictitious; neither is it deviancy but a perfect example of a mother's employment of her maternal powers and preservative love to ensure her children have a perfect life (even if that is in the afterlife).

To conclude, O'Reilly posits that the various positions that mothers provide (preservation, nurturance and cultural bearing) in some of Morrison's novels show that Morrison understands the importance of motherwork for the children and the battle against racism and patriarchy. O'Reilly is of the view that many critics misunderstand or criticise her motherwork and even describe preservative love by some of the characters as "deficient", "too thick" or even "immoral" maternal power. O'Reilly finds such criticism worrisome because to her these critiques oppose exactly what Morrison sets out to do in her working for the salvation of the African-American people (p.152).

In comparison to O'Reilly, Cullinan (2002) in her work titled "A Maternal Discourse of Redemption: Speech and Suffering in Morrison's *Beloved*" argues that despite the plethora of literature on motherhood, most of them are written by daughters but there is none about the mothers writing about themselves, which she calls maternal voices. Her work sets out to discuss the maternal voices on the topic of redemption through their experiences of brokenness, sin, healing and wholeness.

She observes that *Beloved* has the dominant voice and narrative of a mother (Sethe). She asserts that**,** there is the discourse of redemption in *Beloved* which is explored through the voices of Sethe, Baby Suggs and the other women of their community. She links redemption to the maternity of Christ by arguing that "when we view atonement from a maternal perspective, then, we see God as a mother hastening to reassure her children of her love, rather than as an angry father demanding to be placated for slights against his honor" (pp.80-81). Cullinan describes *Beloved* as a story of the suffering of an entire community of people. She continues that the story has no omniscient narrator; it is rather a complex, intricately woven tale by a lot of participants. She categorises the participants into two distinct types: the male voices which she describes as naming suffering which entails both themselves and that of other people. She uses Paul D as a key example of the male defining voice in the novel. She asserts that Paul D could not speak of suffering and so replaced it with singing and shouting and also describes and compartmentalises things and events. She concludes that "the link between Paul D's loss of his ability to speak and loss of himself reinforces the enormous power that voice represents for the men of *Beloved*" (p.84).

In discussing the voices of the daughters, Cullinan attests that they are much more difficult to decipher because of the complexity of mother-daughter relationship which is highly charged with emotions and transmitted from generation to generation. Cullinan describes *Beloved* as typical of the novel in which mother-daughter relationship is either eliminated or portrayed in simple, stereotypical terms, and which denigrates the mother to the heroine daughter who shines more brightly (p.85). She mentions the complexity of the mother-

daughter relationship to be in two folds: a giving mother and a greedy child; and in another fold, the powerful dangerous mother and the helpless, innocent child which causes two difficulties in examining the mother-daughter relationships. The first, she posits, is the issue of scholarship on motherhood in that most analyses on mother-daughter relationships take the daughter as subject and the mother as object. According to Cullinan, when reading *Beloved*, care must be taken not to limit the relationship to only Beloved and Denver but to Sethe as well as it is in fact, another side to the story. She uses Chodorow and Contratto's (1982) feminist writing on motherhood and concludes that the themes of "the fantasy of the perfect/powerful mother, the strong link between death and motherhood, the separation between maternity and sexuality, and the belief that mother and child are an isolated dyad insulated from social and family influences" are all present in the character Sethe (p.87).

Cullinan uses Beloved, Denver and Sethe as key examples in defining the voices of daughters by describing the voices of daughters speaking of their suffering "either as struggling children-lost, angry, inarticulate and afraid" (p.91). With regard to maternal voices, she labels maternal redemption as found in *Beloved* and describes it as a redemption which has a conviction of all things coming together for the good of those who love God. To her:

> The mothers of Beloved, when speaking this maternal discourse of redemption, do not limit their suffering through careful definition and naming; nor do they strike at others laying blame or radiating anger. Rather, there is acceptance-not passive acceptance, but determined action to realise and understand that the worst and the best of their experience fit together into a whole (p.92).

This voice of redemption, she argues, is not stagnant and, leaves silence in its place when the hard work of acceptance has not been achieved.

For maternal discourse and silence, Baby Suggs, Ella and the women in the community and Sethe are key examples in defining the voices. Cullinan describes silence, in the case of Baby Suggs, after the death of Beloved, her granddaughter. There is also the voice of Ella and the women, after years of silence, and finally, that of Sethe who spoke especially about life and death.

Cullinan thus argues, Sethe's maternal voice never failed as did the others in the novel; she never found any situation that left her silent, unable to incorporate its difference into the demands of oneness…while Sethe's voice never failed, it never truly succeeded, either. Her extreme version of a maternal voice could not act as the redemptive force that the other voices of mothers did; Sethe's maternal voice contributed to confusion, isolation and division.

To buttress the issue of extremism in motherhood, Caesar (1994) in his article "Slavery and Motherhood in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" posits the excessive violence in most of Morrison's six novels. He describes *Beloved* not as a novel on slavery, but rather on motherhood. He asserts that motherhood and slavery are convertible terms in terms of slavery in American literature and so is it with mothers and daughters. Therefore, Caesar argues that a mother can feel herself as a slave to her daughter and vice versa and a mother can kill her child not only to save the child from slavery, but to protect herself because she feels enslaved by the child. To counter argue this stance by Caesar, I am of the opinion that slavery and motherhood cannot and are not convertible terms in any way. The concepts of motherhood and slavery,

though related sometimes, are also very different in so many instances. The idea of a mother like Sethe killing her child to save her from slavery, as has been discussed earlier by O'Reilly, portrays the idea of preservative love and not because she feels enslaved by the child. The concept, preservative love, is dominant in this context as Sethe refuses to die in the bush whilst fleeing just to get to her children just as Jacobs hides in an underground hole for seven years for her children to obtain their freedom. This does not in any way indicate their willingness to kill their children in order to dis-enslave themselves from their children.

Caesar is, therefore, of the opinion that Morrison exhibits differences between being a woman and being a mother and one is the question of masculine desire (p.113). He also attempts to define who a daughter is and describes *Beloved* as fractured in terms of its features and indecisiveness of the interpretative problems in the novel. In the view of Caesar, *Beloved* asserts a principle that a daughter is her mother's own child. Therefore, no one is able to define the other, neither mother, nor daughter. Caesar describes Beloved's feelings for her mother as a representation of excessive emotions in the book. Caesar's argument on Beloved's return to Sethe is quoted as:

> Would Beloved have returned so shriekingly, so spitefully, so incorrectly, if she had felt she had been compassionately or morally dealt with by Sethe? Instead, it seems to me, she returns as a daughter who never got to define her love, or even manifest it (p.115).

This might look like a rhetorical question but in my attempt to answer it, I would argue and ask the question "would Beloved have returned at all if she felt she had been cruelly or immorally dealt with?" I am of the view that Beloved's mysterious appearance to 124 does not merit any of the descriptions

above. Instead, the poltergeist appeared in a real form to feel the physical bond between herself and her mother and finally get answers to the questions she never asked.

Caesar points out that motherhood in *Beloved* is divided into a site of both mother and daughter, and victim and oppressor. Motherhood cannot be narrated in a single voice or from a single point of view. To this, I concur. Motherhood has many facets and cannot be defined based on a single experience. To Caesar:

> By concentrating upon a slave mother's act of infanticide and its consequences, Morrison critiques the notion of motherhood as a liberating bond between mother and child, full of libidinal freedom inappropriate by the symbolic order of society. Instead, motherhood is dramatized as a bondage to a psychic economy for which slavery proves to be a convertible term (p.120).

Still discussing motherhood, Li (2006) in her work "Motherhood as Resistance in Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*" is in agreement with scholars such as Tate (1992); Cunningham, (1989); and Spillers (1987) who assert that slavery disrupted the conventional meanings associated with the words: "mother" and "womanhood," because to Li, these nouns or titles work side by side with the abilities of those involved.

Li discusses the empowerment and resistance of Jacobs as a mother and a slave and the effect they will have on her children and their eventual emancipation. To quote her, "converting her body and reproductive abilities from sites of exploitation to vehicles of resistance, Linda undermines the authority of the slave master and works to liberate her children" (p.15).

Li centres her work on female bodily resistance and ideological strategies of literary representation. She buttresses the view that Linda is a

literary figure constructed with the duty of performing certain political aims. Jacobs does not only define motherhood in terms of a political astute literary trope and a design through which abuses of slavery meted out to women are described, it is "also a crucial form of female empowerment" (p.15). I agree with Li in the sense that Jacobs portrayed Linda as a very unique woman who was able to resist her slave master all her life. This is a very rare case of master-slave relationship. Her life in general served as an empowerment to the women around her. Li describes *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* as a narrative which proves a mother's dedication to her children more than the other way round. Using Linda as an example, Li portrays how Linda demonstrates in *Incidents of the Life of a Slave Girl* her love for her children irrespective of not ordering them around or demanding from them any act of love or loyalty. Unlike her grandmother, Aunt Marthy, who has accepted slavery and the will of God and believes praying for contentment will ease the pain of it; Linda refuses to accept slavery and works tirelessly to emancipate her children from slavery. A central aim of the novel is to portray the differences between human bondage and the family unit. The text is aimed at targeting and appealing to the sensibilities of the white, female, middle-class audience with the aim of evoking their sympathies with regards to her struggle between honouring "the relationship between reproduction and the development of familial bonds, given the pervasiveness of sexual encounters between white men and slave women and the predominance of domestic ideologies that emphasised the mother as a figure of purity and the guardian of moral values" (p.18).

Li asserts that Jacobs uses mothers who are separated from their children to bring out the horrors of slavery and establish her point of identification. Jacobs's naming of her fellow slave women as her "sisters" according to Li, unites familial responsibilities with political action. Li observes that Jacobs offers two models of the maternal figure; one who fights for her children to avoid slavery and one who accepts her children in bondage/slavery. This assertion is obvious in the novels *Beloved* and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Sethe and Linda fall under the category of women who fight for their children to avoid slavery. Though their approaches differ greatly and the sacrifices are huge, they achieve independence for themselves and that of their children.

In sum, Li argues that the title of the narrative itself indicates a woman who existed beyond the structure and events of her narrative, and that *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* brings to the fore the legacy of slavery and its restrictions on mothers to care for their children even after they are legally emancipated. The narrative also calls for slavery to be confronted in order for African-American women in the nineteenth century to be free enough to mother their children in a protected environment or society.

One of the tactics employed by the mother characters is acting dead. This act has been described by Kreiger (2008) in "Playing Dead: Harriet Jacobs's *Survival strategy in Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*", as the idea of death in relation to Jacobs's book. Kreiger believes death literally surrounds the narrative's central event and, therefore, Jacobs sets out to argue that there is a commonality between abolitionists and slave narrators by employing death and resurrection as the central event in the narrative. Kreiger asserts that

Jacobs employed the strategy of thanotomimeses, an act employed by victims who feign death in order to avoid further bodily harm. Thanotomimeses portrays submission and resistance exerted simultaneously in a single act and Jacobs is able to perform this act by allowing readers to assume her death when she goes into hiding, followed by an underworld sojourn and an entombment before escaping and resurrecting in the North (p.607). Kreiger further emphasises that this allows Jacobs to employ death in a way that appears both to submit to and resist the values and gestures all in one. The condition of the slave is portrayed as a death from which the individual arises to a new life in freedom (p.609).

According to Kreiger:

> In *Incidents,* Jacobs adopts the abolitionist rhetoric that characterises slavery as a type of death and escape to freedom as a rebirth. Her narrative is unique, however, in her richer use of the concepts of death and resurrection to convey Brent's story (p.610).

Kreiger argues that there is a dilemma which confronts Brent and poses a question to the readers as well, which is the question of whether or not the slave should abandon family in the quest for freedom. The employment of dilemma posed in the life of Linda Brent by Jacobs is no different from that of the one posed by Morrison in the life of Sethe in *Beloved.* These women are both confronted with the question of how they would prefer to emancipate their children from slavery. In the case of Linda, she opted to go into hiding for several years. Sethe took another approach by deciding to kill her children. But at the end of the reading, an implied question is posed to the reader, "What would you have done if you were in their shoes?" This brings out the issue of the dilemma tale which is a continuity of the African folktale in

African-American novels which I have verified as true in my unpublished master's thesis titled "The Dilemma and Trickster Tales as continuities of African Folktales in African-American Folklore: Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* and *Beloved*".

Kreiger posits that Jacob's treatment of death in *Incidents* is a framework for understanding her employment of death as a metaphor for Brent's experience in hiding (p.614). She concludes that, "by telling Brent's story in *Incidents*, Jacobs offers her own figurative death as a narrative turning point that allows her to imagine and to begin to carve out a space for a new identity" (p.619). Applying symbolism and imagery, Michele Mock (1996) in her article "Spitting out the Seed: Ownership of Mother, Child, Breasts, Milk, and Voice in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" is of the view that breastfeeding between a mother and her child is an act of sacred state of communion and labels breastfeeding as the ultimate expression of maternal love. Milk symbolises a mother's love; as such, the absence of it is viewed as a symbol of maternal abandonment as in the case of Ella.

Mock emphasises that her idea of breasts serves different purposes in Sethe's life. It does not only serve as milk for her children, but as symbolic nurturing, as Paul D suckles. To Sethe, the theft of her milk is the greatest crime than anything else ever meted out to her. I agree with Mock in that breast milk is a necessity for both mother and child. No wonder, Sethe deemed it so important that she asked those fleeing with her children to put sugar water in a cloth so the baby could suck from till she arrived later so she would not forget her. This brings out the import of the milk to the mother and the child. Mock posits, therefore, that, "the theft of her milk, psychologically abhorrent

to Sethe, leaves her feeling hatred and revulsion for the men who stole her milk and power" (p.123).

"The Mother-Daughter *Aje* relationship in Toni Morrison's Beloved" by Washington (2005) takes a different approach to analysing Morrison's *Beloved.* Washington adopts a Nigerian theoretical perspective, precisely a Yoruba word known as *Aje* which she defines as a concept that describes a spiritual force that is assumed to be inherent in Africana women. She further states that spiritually empowered humans are called *Aje*. To her, *Aje*, though is a woman empowered, takes into account the male aspect, which is considered essential. However, she is quick to point out that in Audre Lorde's biomythography, "Zami: A new spelling of my name", Jamaica Kincaid's "My Mother", and Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, there is no trace of the father figure in these novels and, therefore, these mother characters perform the roles of both mother and father which can only be done by an empowered person.

Washington describes the primary setting of *Beloved*, 124 Bluestone Road in Cincinnati, Ohio, as a space of freedom. The road Bluestone is believed to have been named after a healing substance called blue-stone that is applied to cuts and though it burns "like hell", heals instantly. Amongst other characteristics, 124 is a place which harbours or accepts freed slaves as well as runaways. Baby Suggs turns the place into a "clearing" which to Washington is for spiritual healing and equates the clearing to the African-American equivalent of the sacred spiritual groves where both West and Central African rituals and initiations, including sacrifice take place. Washington describes Baby Suggs as the Iyanla (Great Mother) of the textual community.

According to Washington, the display of wealth by Baby Suggs to welcome Sethe to 124, brought upon them the silence of the people as punishment when they realised Sethe's slave master had arrived to return her home. This, to Washington from the Yoruba perspective, indicated that Suggs and Sethe trespassed a law of Aje which indicated that there should not be a display of wealth. She recounts 124 as a place occupied by Mother, Daughter and Spirit with the third being invited to share the material space after inviting her ritually. Washington attempts a description of who Beloved actually is, a spirit as Sethe thinks or another kind of dead that is not spiritual but flesh and a survivor from a true slave ship (p.180). In joining this description, I am of the view that Beloved is a reincarnated being who embodies both a child and a slave on a slave ship. Her appearance at 124, symbolises a lot of concepts and ideas that Morrison wants to put across. I conclude that Beloved is symbolic.

Washington describes Beloved as the "marked child" in African-American culture, an 'abiku' in Yoruba culture, (or 'kosamba' in Akan culture), a child of countless sacrifices, many mothers, the walking recollection of atrocities too horrible to remember, the mother who saved her descendants so that they would have the luxury to forget, the Mother whom enslaved Africans first thanked for their safe landings, the Mother of fishes. Summarily, Beloved defies and and encompasses all definitions. Washington, therefore, relates the ambidextrous nature of Beloved to many concepts and ideas which to her is a genuine reflection of all that she stands for.

In my opinion, to tag Beloved as an "abiku" is right. Abiku is a child who dies soon or a few days after being born. This child's death usually is not based on any external factor. It is true that this child is believed to return and

die till some kind of sacrifices and rituals are made to halt the whole process. Beloved does not die willingly; she is killed by her own mother as a form of protection for her. Though this marks a contradiction in the definition of an abiku, it can still be argued that, she is a "marked child" with the mark of the saw on her neck. Though her return is not based on any rituals or sacrifices made on her behalf, her presence reminds her mother of who she is. Still discussing symbolism, Wyatt (1993) in her work, "The Maternal Symbolic in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" is of the view that Morrison's novel uniquely portrays three orders of experience which are absent in the narratives of the Western culture. These orders are childbirth and nursing from a mother's perspective; the desires of a preverbal infant; and the sufferings of those destroyed by slavery, including the Africans who died on the slave ships (p.474). Wyatt finds that Morrison through a ghost story gives voice to a preverbal infant killed by her mother in a bid to save her from slavery. This baby, Beloved, returns in a body of a 19-year-old and articulates these infantile feelings which ordinarily remain unspoken. Beloved represents a collective identity and a whole lineage of people eliminated by slavery (p.474).

Wyatt posits that her use of the term 'maternal symbolic' is "not only an alternative language incorporating maternal and material values but also a system that, like Lacan's symbolic, locates subjects in relation to other subjects" (p.475). I agree with Wyatt regarding the usage of the term 'maternal symbolic' as a system which locates subjects, in this case, mothers in relation to other subjects, in this case, children. There is always an interwoven correlation between the mother and the child(ren).

Wyatt uses Sethe and Jacobs to elaborate on the figure of a heroic slave mother that replaces the heroic slave fugitive in many female slave narratives. Wyatt concludes that Sethe's employment of the infanticide is the ultimate contradiction of mothering in slavery. This contradiction is experienced through resistance. Some scholars like Brooks (2008), for instance, discuss this resistance in their works.

Brooks (2008) in "The Black Maternal: Heterogeneity and Resistance in Literary Representations of Black Mothers in 20th century African-American and Afro Caribbean Women's fiction" employs Morrison's *Sula* and Hurston's *Jonah's Gourd Vine* as she discusses the mothers in the novels and the essence of resistance by Afro American women and Caribbean women in slavery. Her discussion juxtaposes mothers who do not succeed in resisting slavery with mothers who are successful in resisting the ideal. Her term "a complex pastiche of common binaries" (p.38) describes women who deviate from the stereotypical characterisation and refuse to concede their personal agency to even their own children. The issue of Black mother-daughter relationships which trains daughters to be self-reliant and independent as well as mothers who abject their daughters, she argues, initiates the process of abjection. She analyses how women form their identity through abjection of their daughters. Her work also focuses on the 'transcendent black mother' which she defines as "a communication process that occurs between a young female novice and at least two foremothers endowed with supernatural powers" (p.87). There is a bond between the woman described and the ancestors. To her, "the female ancestors use the communication process of the

transcendent Black Maternal to expose their novices to an epistemology that encompasses that which is not rational" (p.88).

The idea of communication and relationship between a woman and her ancestors is depicted by Hradil (2009) in her paper. Hradil (2009) in "Motherhood in Selected Works by African American Women Writers of Three Generations" describes various mothers in three different African-American novels. She essentially sees the black woman's suffering in two stages. The first is the patriarchal oppression they face through nature and culture. The second is the racial prejudices and discrimination they face as black women from others and even their fellow women. Therefore, they represent an image of a black mother and serve as inspiration to both their sons and daughters. This is similar to the paper by Ghasemi and Hajizadeh (2012) who also discuss the African American mother stereotypes.

Ghasemi and Hajizadeh (2012) in "Demystifying the Myth of Motherhood: Toni Morrison's Revision of African American Mother Stereotypes" concentrate on Morrison's works *Beloved* and *Jazz*. They opine that the black woman is always portrayed or defined by motherhood or as a mother figure which is not always the case. They assert that unlike the stereotypical mother figure coined out for black women, Morrison defies the norm by creating women characters who are often "independent, strong, determined (to the degree that they are sometimes abusive), and self-seeking" (p.477). Morrison's portrayal of women, therefore, conflicts with the notion that motherhood always binds the mother to the child and not to the individual herself. They are of the view that the women characters in Morrison's novels are not limited to the ideology of black maternity and matriarchy, and that they

seek to establish their own identities despite the general definition of a conventional mother. Morrison, therefore, demystifies the myth of motherhood by establishing her own characters that do not follow the patriarchal or slavery notion of motherhood that is always tied to their children, but rather seeks to find them in recreating their own individualities and destinies.

In emphasising women's writings, like that of Ghasemi and Hajizadeh (2012), Powe (2004) in "Black Women Writing Black Mother Figures: Reading Black Motherhood in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Meridian*" examines how the various mothers in the two books were portrayed. She asserts that Hurston has greatly influenced the writings of Morrison, Williams and Walker and African female writers like Buchi Emecheta and Bessie Head. She stresses that the notion of "superwoman" used to be the terminology. This terminology is rejected by liberating black women on the basis that it is "exhausting and burdensome" (p.10). She expresses the view that Hurston and Walker have dispersed the mentality that the black "good" woman is not consistent in terms of loving, nurturing, and being altruistic with their children. She concludes that Hurston and Walker downplay the idea of the stereotype black super woman which has been accepted for years. Their idea of a "new" black woman is one who is independent and creative and focused.

Conclusion

I have attempted to provide a critical review of the current scholarship on the concept of 'motherhood' in African-American literature. I have observed that much of the reviewed scholarship provides a detailed account of 'motherhood' without considering the important notion of 'mothering' which

is a differentiated extension of the generic concept of motherhood. My observation represents a significant gap in the scholarship on the African-American fiction. It is the objective of the present study, therefore, to contribute towards filling the critical gap. I intend to provide an analysis that highlights the centrality of 'mothering' in the social strata of the African-American novel. It is, therefore, important to end this section of the chapter by offering a summary of what has been said about the two concepts of motherhood and mothering not only from a theoretical perspective but also from the perspective of their relationship with the work of Morrison and the other authors identified in the thesis. The chapter has noted that mothering and motherhood differ. The literature has indicated that whereas motherhood is conceptualised as a male-defined institution that oppresses women, mothering is conceptualised as experiential as it focuses on the everyday experiences of mothers. We have also noted that whereas motherhood is oppressive of women, mothering has been conceptualised as empowering. In spite of these generally true observations about the two concepts, the discussion in this section has argued that any conceptualisation of motherhood and mothering will have to recognise cultural relativity and must eschew attempts at universalism, that often implies a western hegemony.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESISTING THE NORM: THE JOURNEY OF MATERNAL SACRIFICE IN TONI MORRISON'S *BELOVED* AND HARRIET JACOBS' *INCIDENTS IN THE LIFE OF A SLAVE GIRL*

I had a woman's pride, and a mother's love for my children; and I resolved that out of the darkness of this hour a brighter dawn should rise for them. My master had power and law on his side; I had a determined will. There is might in each.
(Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, 95)

Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed various relevant themes on mothering and motherhood in the four novels selected. The chapter concluded that most of the scholarship on the reviews centred on the concept of motherhood, instead of mothering. This chapter is a response to the question on the mother characters who defy or resist the master narrative set by the community in protecting their children. The focus of this chapter will be on Linda Brent in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs and Sethe in *Beloved* by Toni Morrison. These characters are justifiably selected because of their unique qualities which include their strong willed nature.

The Uniqueness of Linda Brent and Sethe

In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Linda Brent, a slave, manages to escape slavery by hiding in a garret for seven years in order to protect her children from being condemned to slavery also. Her attempt yields good results as her children finally are bought by their white father and sent abroad where she eventually meets them and establishes a family again. *Beloved* centres on the character Sethe, a slave who escapes from slavery together with her children. Their freedom is short-lived when she realizes her former slave

master approaching her in her new residence. In order to prevent herself and her children from being taken back into slavery, she attempts to kill them. She does not succeed totally as she is able to kill only one of her children. This act gives her the opportunity to stay with the rest of her children as freed people.

The characters, Linda Brent and Sethe, are 'unique' individuals who journey through slavery, flight and freedom as mothers. I label them unique because they are characters who experienced all the periods of slavery, flight and freedom under this study and yet maintained their status as mothers. Their destinies emerge and diverge at different times and under different circumstances. The idea behind juxtaposing them is to assess their upbringing and lifestyle, and equate it to how they managed to be unique amongst the slaves in their various plantations and openly defiant of their slave masters. Putting these two characters at par does not, in any way, influence the renditions of the term 'mothering' which this thesis seeks to provide meaning to. This chapter, therefore, analyses these two characters in terms of their personalities, their unique ways of nurturing their children and their exclusive approaches in protecting them.

The notion of motherhood has been naturalized into an inevitable routine by the patriarchal social order represented by the generic human community to the extent that mother and the reproductive and child-raising functions have invariably become synonymous. This synonym has set the tone for the quintessential prominence of mothering in the periods of slavery, flight and freedom in the African-American history. The concept of motherhood relates to the biological trajectory of pregnancy, childbirth and nurturing of the young into adulthood. These social and biological ideals portray the

stereotypical involvement of the mother, the family members and sometimes the community. The obvious assumption is that under the tutelage of motherhood, a child cannot become a deviant in society due to the coveted set of rules and regulations expected of the mother to influence the child. To deviate from that expectation of the society therefore calls for a critical outlook into the personality of the mother(s) in question.

It is essential to note that the African-American women writers, especially the feminists have divergent ideas regarding the expected role of the woman in the context of the socially-constructed notion of motherhood. The experiences of slavery, together with their alternatives of flight and struggle for freedom, provide a definition of the term motherhood, which to these writers, encapsulate the ideals of nurturing, giving life and raising well-brought up children. Without any alteration and fixed definition, therefore, mothering is adopted by the African-American feminists to advance the idea of motherhood which is more aggressive, protective and ferocious and can only be linked to people who have experienced slavery. This term 'mothering', though not exclusive to the African-American community, is one which has been embraced by them and its popularity is established in a lot of their women's writings. It is imperative to acknowledge characters such as Linda Brent and Sethe to highlight the issue of mothering which the African-American women have tried to voice both subtly and overtly. In order to understand this concept of mothering from the African-American perspective, it is essential to look at these two very important characters. The analysis can be thematised under four very important aspects: othermothering, bad and good mothers, zoomorphic tendencies as well as society's perception.

Othermothering

With regard to space, it is essential to note that born into slavery, both Linda Brent and Sethe share a spatial commonality, a plantation. The plantation therefore becomes a turning point in the lives of these women about the decisions they (these women) make which affects their lives and that of their children in so many ways. The definition of slavery differs significantly between these two women as observed in the novels. Raised by different women, Linda Brent, though born in slavery, is ignorant about classifying herself. She has the privilege of staying with both parents, her brother as well as her grandmother in a home. This idea of familial stability evokes love, protection and affection for Linda Brent in the early few years of her life. She experiences othermothering later in life in the form of her grandmother Molly Horniblow and her mother's sister, Aunt Nancy:

> I was born a slave; but I never knew it till six years of happy childhood had passed away… In complexion my parents were a light shade of brownish yellow, and were termed mulattoes. They lived together in a comfortable home; and, though we were all slaves, I was so fondly shielded that I never dreamed I was a piece of merchandise, trusted to them for safekeeping, and liable to be demanded of them at any moment. I had one brother, William, who was two years younger than myself-a bright, affectionate child. I had also a great treasure in my maternal grandmother (p.7).

Linda Brent's family are mulattoes. This affords them a position in society. Mulattoes were the offspring of white and black and as such were seen to resemble white children more than blacks. The mulatto breed were bought at higher prices on the market and were very easy to sell (hooks, 1982). The representation of the family by Linda as Mulattoes, though this does not seem to unravel the mystery behind their living comfortably together, prompts the

reader on how mulattoes were treated and regarded as compared to black slaves. Carby (1987) is of the view that "the mulatto figure is a narrative device of mediation; it allows for a fictional exploration of the relationship between the races while being at the same time an imaginary expression of the relationship between the races" (p.171). The mulattoes were a complex part of the slave trade. They were people denied by their own white fathers and were considered blacks just because they had a drop of blackness in them from their mothers. Mulattoes, therefore, represented the falsities of race. This identity of mulattoes in Linda's family can arguably justify why her life as a slave was more lenient as compared to that of Sethe, a black slave. Hence, Linda's inability to reduce her status to that of a slave till the death of her mother is of no surprise to the reader.

Sethe, on the other hand, is denied the ability to recognize her own mother and share a bond with her. The idea of being nursed by different women at different times and by her own mother after nursing her mistress's babies is an indication of the disoriented nature of life imposed on a child born into slavery. Sethe grew up on the slave plantation. In a quest to be recognised as the birth mother, Sethe's mother revealed herself to Sethe with an identification mark under her breast which she secretly showed to Sethe. This desperate act served as the only method of identification and bonding between mother and child who felt the need to be recognised by her own child and mourned after she died. Just like her predecessors, including Baby Suggs and Sethe's mother, the predominant fear in Linda Brent and Sethe's lives was loving their children. This is because of the fear of 'losing' a child after birth, not due to ill-health or death, but to being sold and lost forever. According to

Davis (1981), enslaved (black) women who birthed children were not seen as mothers but as instruments guaranteeing the growth of the slave labourforce. They were considered to be "breeders", like animals, whose monetary value could be precisely calculated in terms of their ability to multiply their numbers. Since slave women were classified as "breeders" as opposed to "mothers", their infant children could be sold away from them like calves from cows. It is because of this social and cultural construct which was a backbone of the slave society that makes Sethe as I have previously pointed out, experience the idealized system of othermothering in which different women take the role of being mothers for the children of their fellow slaves:

> Of that place where she was born (Carolina maybe? Or was it Louisiana?) she remembered only song and dance. Not even her own mother, who was pointed out to her by the eight-year-old child who watched over the young ones-pointed out as the one among many backs turned away from her, stooping in a watery field. Patiently Sethe waited for this particular back to gain the row's end and stand. What she saw was a cloth hat as opposed to a straw one, singularity enough in that world of cooing women each of whom was called Ma'am (p.30).

This system of othermothering serves as the ultimate form of idealized mothering to the slave population with the agenda of being each other's keeper in order to survive and maintain the possibility of posterity. According to Davis (1981), the slave women left their infants in the care of young children or older slaves who were unable to perform hard labour in the fields. The two characters, Sethe and Linda Brent, project the concept of othermothering. The African-American woman borrows the concept of othermothering from her ancestral West African traditions to help her children survive the absurdities and perversions of slavery. The practice labelled othermothering by scholars like Edwards (2005); Abbey and O'Reilly (1998) and hooks (1984) extends

the relationship between mother and child to include other 'mothers' in a scenario that is still very much prevalent in some parts of rural West Africa is established right from birth, through breastfeeding to the first steps of the child and beyond. According to Edwards, othermothering migrated from "West African practices of communal lifestyles and interdependence of communities" (p.88).

Consequently, Collins (1993) observed that "[m]othering [in West Africa] was not a privatized nurturing 'occupation' reserved for biological mothers, and the economic support of children was not the exclusive responsibility of men" (p.45). Rather, mothering expressed itself as both nurturance and work, and care of children was viewed as the duty of the larger community, to sum it up, "it takes a village to raise a child". To Collins, these complementary dimensions of mothering and the practice of communal mothering/othermothering give women great influence and status in West African societies. She elaborates: First, since they are not dependent on males for economic support and provide much of their own and their children's economic support, women are structurally central to families. Second, the image of the mother is culturally elaborated and valued across diverse West African societies. Finally, while the biological mother-child bond is valued, childcare was a collective responsibility, a situation fostering cooperative, age-stratified, woman centered "mothering" networks. (p.45).

These West African cultural practices, Collins argues, were retained by enslaved African-Americans even under slave conditions and gave rise to a distinct tradition of African-American motherhood in which the custom of othermothering and community mothering was emphasized and elaborated, in

her article "Community Mothering: The Relationship between Mothering and the Community Work of Black Women," explains:

> The experience of slavery saw the translation of othermothering to new settings, since the care of children was an expected task of enslaved Black women in addition to the field or house duties. [T]he familial instability of slavery engendered the adaptation of communality in the form of fostering children whose parents, particularly mothers, had been sold. This tradition of communality gave rise to the practice of othermothering. The survival of the concept is inherent to the survival of Black people as a whole since it allowed for the provision of care to extended family and non blood relations (p.80).

The practice of othermothering, therefore, remains central to the African-American tradition of motherhood and is regarded as essential for the survival of black people.

The name 'othermothering' in itself reveals the identity of empowerment to the women who are responsible for the slave children they cater for. This identity is portrayed in the authority and the role one woman plays in the lives of the children of another woman. This kind of empowerment, I strongly argue, rather could confuse the child who later is unable to recognise or differentiate her birth mother in the midst of all the other women who have "mothered" her in one way or the other. A typical example is how Sethe once cannot even identify her biological mother from the other women at the plantation. But as has been argued earlier, the practicality of othermothering being very common in the slave era enabled slave women to be on the lookout for each other's children and enable their safety in diverse ways.

Good and Bad Mothers

The status quo set out by the community, in this case, African-American community with regards to mothering can be captured through the definitions given by Rich (2004); O'Reilly (2004); Green (2004) who opine that the general interpretation given is that mothering which is interchangeable with motherhood covers the period of pregnancy, through childbirth and even beyond. Mothering is representational and has a particular style of nurturing, which brings the idea of "good or ideal" mother and "bad mother." Of course, the "good or ideal" mother is what has been defined by the community to be one who follows all the ideals expected of a mother. To scholars such as Ashe (1995), "bad mothers" come from particular cultural-or class-backgrounds or deviate from social stereotypes. This brings into question the particular class backgrounds to which these women belong. In order not to be biased, I presume Ashe holds the view that any cultural or class background can have a representational "bad mother". To this end, this research will concentrate on the latter part of the definition by scholars like Ashe which propounds bad mothers as women who deviate from social stereotypes. The African-American community provides a status quo which ostensibly provides a clear cut difference between a "good or ideal mother", and a "bad mother".

This disparity between the two types of motherhood brings into contestation the symbolically linked idea and definition of mothering by feminists which in my opinion confers the same idea as that of the definition given to a "bad mother" by the community. To some African-American feminist scholars like Reyes (2002); Rich (2004); and O'Reilly (2004), mothering is devoid of patriarchal influence and empowers women. I opine

that this kind of empowerment bestowed on women gives the community the arguable indication of tagging them as "bad mothers" and deviants.

The state of being a mother tends to be replicated in both Linda and Sethe in that they become mothers at very tender ages. The fight for their children is a confirmation of their non-compromising attitude towards matters related to them. This emotional expression is felt when Linda has her first born. She prefers her premature child to die with her in order to avoid the pangs of slavery. "I heard the doctor say I could not survive till morning. I had often prayed for death; but now I did not want to die, unless my child could die too" (p.68). Her preference for being alive is based on the survival of her son.

The state of being a mother with regard to Sethe takes a different emotional rendition. Sethe's plans of escape coincide with the birth of her last born, Denver, whom she is pregnant with in the course of her flight. The vulnerable nature of a pregnant woman to undertake such an exploit of flight presents a rather assertive character. The courage to plan as well as escape without her husband Halle depicts the determination of the slave woman. Paul D expresses his surprise in a conversation, "You had that baby, did you? Never thought you'd make it. He chuckled. Running off pregnant." (p.8). This statement by Paul D is an indication of what the community thought with regards to a pregnant woman escaping from slavery. The idea of a vulnerable pregnant woman with a dress soiled as a result of unsucked breastmilk escaping slavery is a sight which the community fails to fathom. The whole idea of escape which shall be henceforth referred to as 'flight', meant everything to a woman who was bent on getting to her children and

reconciling with them. If it meant walking on feet so swollen that she could not see her arch or feel her ankles, in the sixth month of pregnancy and would and could not stop because her "little antelope" rammed in her womb every time she made a stop (p.30), then she would continue the flight all alone. The thought of her dying first and leaving her "little antelope" in her womb to suffer before dying, "…grieved her so she made the groan that made the person walking on a path not ten yards away halt and stand right still" (p.31). It is this form of mothering Lawson (2000) argues, that Black women's participation in mothering is a form of emotional and spiritual expression in places that marginalise Black women. This emotional expression deployed by Sethe portrays the symbolic attachment in the form of an umbilical bond between mother and child. Why would a dying woman be concerned about her unborn baby? This is because this umbilical bond, I am suggesting here, symbolises an inexplicable form of attachment between a woman and her child. This bond, I further argue, can push a woman to send her children away on flight as she struggles to get milk to one of them, Beloved to be precise, who was starving for the food she carried no matter the circumstances (p.31). To Sethe:

> Anybody could smell me long before he saw me. And when he saw me he'd see the drops of it on the front of my dress. Nothing I could do about that. All I knew was I had to get my milk to my baby girl. Nobody was going to nurse her like me. Nobody was going to get it to her fast enough, or take it away when she had enough and didn't know it. Nobody knew that she couldn't pass her air if you held her upon your shoulder, only if she was lying on my knees. Nobody knew that but me and nobody had her milk but me. I told that to the women in the wagon. Told them to put sugar water in cloth to suck from so when I got there in a few days she wouldn't have forgot me. The milk would be there and I would be there with it (p.16).

Deploying the definition of mothering further, both Linda and Sethe undertake what I would term "aberrant mothering" because the murder Sethe committed to 'save' her children does not in any way deviate from the definition of mothering discussed above. As a mother and a father to the children she had birthed, Sethe had power to provide all that she thought was good for her children. Murdering her child(ren) in order to save them from the pangs of slavery was no small feat. Not only did it take a strong willed woman to display such a grotesque act, it also takes a woman who is bent on resisting the norm. To buttress this point, I agree with scholars like Collins (2000) who are of the view that four controlling images of Black womanhood were borne as a result of the dominant ideology of slavery: the mammy, the matriarch, the welfare mother, and the Jezebel. These images she describes as enabling women to resist the negative evaluations of motherhood in order to rearticulate the power inherent in the everyday experiences of motherhood (p.5).

The idea of mothering does not only encompass these terminologies. The ideas posited by Collins are implied in various forms and call for reinterpretation from various scholars. I would interpret Linda Brent and Sethe as the matriarch mothers because they had no male figures to affirm their statutes as mothers. Linda had her children with a white man in a nearby area in order to avoid the incessant sexual harassment from her master. On the other hand, Sethe's husband Halle, mysteriously got missing on the day they decided to take flight together as a family. Sethe was, therefore, left alone to escape with the children. Nevertheless, the idea of flight became an integral part of their history. Both Linda Brent and Sethe made some form of escape in the early stages of their lives. Linda Brent escaped from her master's sexual

advances by having children whereas Sethe made an escape to save her children from the pangs of slavery. Both forms of escape therefore were made with the sole decisions of the women involved.

Sethe's killing of her child is a mark of a mother who is bent on disassociating her children from slavery in all ways possible:

> Inside, two boys bled in the sawdust and dirt at the feet of a nigger woman holding a blood-soaked child to her chest with one hand and an infant by the heels in the other. She did not look at them; she simply swung the baby toward the wall planks, missed and tried to connect a second time, when out of nowhere…the old nigger boy…snatched the baby from the arch of its mother's swing…But now she had gone wild…He could claim the baby struggling in the arms of the mewing old man, but who'd tend her? Because the woman-something was wrong with her (pp.149-150).

It is this action that provokes the community into labelling a mother as bad, yet this same action is seen as empowerment by feminists though it must be noted that the times and the circumstances in which these events happened are different. The stance by Sethe in attempting to kill all her children before they are recaptured by the slave masters is one that can only be taken by a woman who knows what is best for her children. To Sethe, infanticide becomes the only condition to portray her motherly love to her children. The appropriate response I would give to the nephew of Schoolteacher (slave master) when he kept asking, "what she go do that for?" (p.150) which I am of the opinion, represented the question on the minds of all those around, can be captured in a very simple term called "mothering". This "mothering" gave Sethe the stability and nonchalance to nurse the same baby she was attempting to kill moments before:

> Sethe reached up for the baby without letting the dead one go. Baby Suggs shook her head. "One at a time," she said and traded the living for the dead, which she carried into the keeping room. When she came back, Sethe was aiming a bloody nipple into the baby's mouth. Baby Suggs slammed her fist on the table, and shouted, "Clean up! Clean yourself up!" They fought then…Each struggling for the nursing child. Baby Suggs lost…So Denver took her mother's milk right along with the blood of her sister. And that's the way they were when the Sheriff returned… (p.152)

The ambivalence of the term 'mothering' is vividly established by Sethe through the ironical lens. The irony is that at one moment she escapes from a slave home just to be there for her children. She refuses to die in the onion fields because of the thoughts of how her children will survive without her. There is no hesitancy by the same woman in attempting to kill these same children and offering them breast milk. Sucking breast milk represents as well as symbolizes life for a new born baby as breast milk immediately after birth is believed to offer all the necessary ingredients needed in a baby to survive. Agreeing with Mock (1996), breast feeding between mother and child represents an act of a sacred state of communion and to her, therefore, breast feeding is the ultimate expression of maternal love (p.118). This act of breast feeding was so essential for Sethe that a piece of cloth filled with sugar water was given to her baby to suck when they were escaping so she would not forget her mother (p.16). Blood, on the other hand, symbolically represents various concepts including death. In Sethe's case, the blood on her is that of her girl Beloved which came about through an act of violence when she sawed her neck. This is to say the bloody nipple she has as a result of the murder of her baby symbolically links blood and breast milk. The oxymoronic combination of both life and death given to her baby through the bloody

nipple establishes a covenant between a mother and her child which can result in either life or death. This symbolic gesture can also be interpreted as a neutralization between life and death. Life and death are, therefore, diffused at this particular moment; bringing into contestation the antithetical imagery expected. This covenant interprets the authority of a mother over her child and establishes the argument that a woman can give life to a child and can equally take it. The mother has unlimited control over her children and can decide their fate. The act also justifiably interprets Sethe's culpability at that time due to the dilemma she found herself in; whether to allow her children back into slavery or kill them all to avoid it.

Linda Brent's situation is no better than Sethe's. Her existent life is based on the survival of her children and her capriciousness is embedded in the lives of her children. To her, "My life was spared; and I was glad for the sake of my little ones. Had it not been for these ties to life, I should have been glad to be released by death, though I had lived only nineteen years" (p.87).

This notwithstanding, as earlier depicted in Sethe's life, inasmuch as these mothers attempted shielding their children no matter the consequences, there is also the idea of elimination of these same children when the mothers feel insecure with regards to their lives. Linda Brent feels the lives of her children are being threatened and so she says, "I thought to myself that, God being my helper, they should never pass into his hands. It seemed to me I would rather see them killed than have them given up to his power." (p.89).

The killing of these children was not the intent of Linda Brent in the first place; she was resolved to kill them if it became necessary. She planned on executing her thoughts with regards to their killing and carrying them along

if it meant being branded as a bad mother. The idea of going into hiding just so her children can 'have life' in the form of being sold gives her the urge and the boldness to go in a shed under her grandmother's house for seven years in order to hide from her slave master. To her, therefore:

> To this hole I was conveyed as soon as I entered the house. The air was stifling; the darkness total. A bed had been spread on the floor. I could sleep quite comfortably on one side; but the slope was so sudden that I could not turn on the other without hitting the roof. The rats and mice ran over my bed… Morning came. I knew it only by the noises I heard; for in my small den day and night were all the same. I suffered for air even more than for light. But I was not comfortless. I heard the voices of my children…this continued darkness was oppressive. It seemed horrible to sit or lie in a cramped position day after day, without one gleam of light. Yet I would have chosen this, rather than my lot as a slave (p.128).

The image depicted is that of a caged animal. Linda Brent in an attempt to portray her uneasiness in the hole, attempted exploring the imagery which appeals to all the senses. Her visual sense is expressed through the perpetual darkness she finds herself. Her tactile sense is through the rats and mice which ran over her bed and the uncomfortable nature of her bed. Her auditory sense is expressed through the noises she hears, especially from her children and her olfactory sense is expressed through the stifled air she inhales every day. This imagery portrayed to the reader denies an individual of all the important humanely senses and reduces the person to the status of an animal with no importance attached to any of the senses whatsoever.

The uncomfortable nature of Linda Brent's hideout deprives her of all the senses she has or can experience, but it is obvious that the love for her children keeps her going and surviving in that 'hell-hole'. It is interesting to note how a woman empowered by her own instincts and decisions endures

living in such a den for almost seven years with the assurance of buying freedom for her children. This den has a great impact on her life and thereafter. The question posed is how a woman can hide in a hole just underneath a house where she hears the sounds of her children each day and stubbornly restrains herself from meeting them or even revealing herself to them when it becomes dire. This marks a significant characteristic of mothering which is obvious with both mothers. This attitude of Linda puts both herself and her children in a very compromising situation: the psychological and emotional trauma of seeing and hearing her children each day without being able to hold them or show affection to them and on the other hand, her children living with the idea that their mother is dead. Yet, her brazenness denies her the emotions associated with these situations:

> Season after season, year after year, I peeped at my children's faces, and heard their sweet voices, with a heart yearning all the while to say, "Your mother is here". Sometimes it appeared to me as if ages had rolled away since I entered upon that gloomy, monotonous existence. At times, I was stupefied and listless; at other times I became very impatient to know when these dark years would end, and I should again be allowed to feel the sun-shine, and breathe the pure air (p.166)

These two women, Linda Brent and Sethe do not conform to the ideals of the society with regards to who a good or bad mother is. Their only consent is to protect their children at all cost and that is exactly what they do.

Zoomorphic tendencies

In discussing the tendency to be zoomorphic when the need arises, it is expedient to discuss the geographic situation of Linda, which s the hole or garret. This hole which Linda inhabited for almost seven years had psychological as well as intellectual implications for her. A woman who has

'caved' herself for a long period of time as a form of escape will most definitely suffer from cognitive and intellectual abilities. Amissah-Arthur (2017) theorises the concepts of 'caving' and 'caging' in his work: *Towards a Theory of the Colonialist Novel: Caving, Caging, Theft and Voicing as a Structural Grammar*. According to Amissah-Arthur, the concept of 'caving', which is being kept in a cave or being presumed to live in a cave, represents any circumstance that circumscribes a person and inhibits the exercising and enjoyment of his or her inalienable God-given rights and freedoms. In other words, caving leads naturally to 'caging' which he defines as shackling. In Amissah-Arthur's theory, caving and caging can take many forms, such as physical and psychic. He stresses that the physical cave always produces psychic or intellectual disabilities, and cites Plato's allegory of the cave as a classic example of the physical caving producing psychic caving for those chained in the subterranean aperture. The mental deficiency and retardation that results from caving and caging leads to zoomorphic representation of the caved and caged. He cites the Amahagger tribe of Henry Rider Haggard's colonialist novel, *She* (1887), as an instance of caving and caging inflicting psychic deficiency and promoting animalistic behavior (2017:167-8).

I shall borrow Amissah-Arthur's concept for the present study because I discern in Linda, self-caving and caging, which leads to metaphorically transforming her into an 'animal'. The slave era conditioned slaves under the impression that they were below the rank of animals. This comparison is clearly seen in *Beloved*, in which the cockerel is called Mister, and in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, in which the pet dog is valued over the life of a slave. The value placed on these pets over slaves by the slave masters

had psychological effects on the slaves in the long run. Caving herself for such a long time, therefore, brings out the zoomorphic tendencies in the slave mother who unhesitatingly descends to the level of a caged animal without any concern for social norms as she attempts to save her children. She says:

> My friends feared I should become a cripple for life; and I was so weary of my long imprisonment that, had it not been for the hope of serving my children, I should have been thankful to die; but, for their sakes, I was willing to bear on. (p.141)

This zoomorphic tendency is equally comparable to that of Stamp Paid's description of Sethe in her attempt to protect her children when she saw School master coming for them. He compares her to the hawk, and describes vividly the other parts of her body as that of the bird that preys:

> So Stamp Paid did not tell him how she flew, snatching up her children like a hawk on the wing; how her face beaked, how her hands worked like claws, how she collected them every which way: one on her shoulder, one under her arm, one by the hand, the other shouted forward into the woodshed filled with just sunlight and shavings now because there wasn't any wood (p.157).

The predominant image employed is the symbol of an animal archetype. Sethe is symbolized as an animal, specifically, a hawk which uses all its predatory features to protect its young.

It is expedient to mention that Linda eventually left her cave to embark on a flight to freedom which, though was very adventurous and hazardous, was propelled by the love for her children. Juxtaposing Linda and Sethe, these two slave mothers all embarked on flights to freedom. Linda's flight was to get away from her children whom she feared, were unsafe around her and Sethe's flight was to get to her children she felt were unsafe without her. The flight in both instances carved a niche for these mothers as brave, powerful

and deviants. In totality, the flights initiated the beginning of a journey which had implications for these women. These flights nearly cost them their lives at Snaky Swamp for Linda and in the onion field for Sethe. The precariousness of these flights determined their statuses later in life. Should they have been caught in their flights, the focus of their plans would have been thwarted. What they were fighting for would have been lost to them, and they would have stopped being mothers who were bent on saving their children. I argue that the flight is the pivotal point in the lives of these women, and concur with Reyes (2002) that, "to take flight" implies moving from slavery to political freedom. This is clearly the case for these slave mothers. They were bent on obtaining freedom for their children irrespective of the consequences.

Society's Perception

The community's misconstruction of the conduct of these women playing their mothering role had no effect on these women in their quest to achieve what they had planned. These slave mothers were misunderstood and given names by the community. In the case of the character Linda, her grandmother always attempts to portray her as a "bad mother" to her children:

> Whenever the children climbed on my knee, or laid their heads on my lap, she would say, "Poor little souls! What would you do without a mother? She don't love you as I do." And she would hug them to her own bosom, as if to reproach me for my want of affection; but she knew all the while that I loved them better than my life (p.102).

Linda Brent's grandmother, who represents the community in which Linda finds herself, has a high opinion of Linda as a "bad mother" who does not care about her children. Her decisions such as abandoning her children are seen as weird and very unlike a mother who has the welfare of her children at heart.

Her escape serves as a form of heartlessness for all and sundry even after her young children are jailed just to appeal to her senses to come out of her hiding and save them. Her slave master Dr. Flint voices the loud thoughts of those around when he says:

> As for their mother, her ladyship will find out yet what she gets by running away. She hasn't so much feeling for her children as a cow has for its calf. If she had, she would have come back long ago, to get them out of jail, and save all this expense and trouble. The good-for-nothing hussy! (p.115)

The comparison made by Dr. Flint between Linda Brent and her children and a cow and its calf depicts the same symbol of an animal archetype as given to Sethe which degrades the slave mother to the lowliest of beings. This description is equated to Paul D's statement to Sethe about having two legs and not four. Equally, therefore, the community regards Linda Brent as an "animal". This comparison, therefore, which conveys the voice of the community describes the animal tendencies of these mother slaves.

Sethe's action, on the other hand, is misconstrued by the community as a proud and arrogant person:

> Outside a throng, now, of black faces stopped murmuring. Holding the living child, Sethe walked past them in their silence and hers. She climbed into the cart, her profile knife-clean against a cheery blue sky. A profile that shocked them with its clarity. Was her head a bit too high? Her back a little too straight? Probably. Otherwise the singing would have begun at once, the moment she appeared in the doorway of the house on Bluestone Road. Some cape of sound would have quickly been wrapped around her, like arms to hold and steady her on the way. As it was, they waited till the cart turned about, headed west to town. And then no words. Humming. No words at all. (p.152)

The quotation above depicts what I would label as the narrative 'misrepresentation' of Morrison on both Sethe and the crowd. Sethe is

misrepresented as an arrogant person and a flat character who does not succumb to change or misfortune. The crowd, on the other hand, is depicted as ready to empathise with Sethe if need be but retreat upon observing Sethe's demeanour. This misrepresentation of Sethe is construed to signify the heartless and emotionless state of a slave who is called a mother and who plays a significant role in the lives of her children. The excerpt above explicitly portrays the attitude of the community towards a woman they presume to have a psychological problem. There is no discourse after Sethe is taken away except for the humming. The refusal of the community to engage in a series of discourse in an attempt to comprehend what really happened depicts their stance. To them, Sethe has flouted the status quo concerning mother and child. She has behaved irrationally and to sum up their thoughts in Paul D's words, "You got two feet, Sethe, not four" (p.165). She has been labelled as an "animal" by all standards. Her posture after the incident creates enmity between herself and the community because the community finds her posture inappropriate and portraying unrepentance. It is at this juncture that the issue of mothering which "devours and destroys" by Reyes (2002) is established. Sethe has destroyed her children and has no shame about it.

Just as Linda Brent goes through a stressful journey and has to secure a job in another land in order to buy her daughter back and educate her better as she feels owning herself is the only way out in protecting her children, so is Sethe is prepared and willing to sacrifice about thirty minutes of her time and body for a name to be chiseled on the tombstone of her daughter. Even in their freed lives, the urgency to administer the mothering roles is evident and very vigorous. Sethe's ten minutes' sexual encounter in exchange for the name

'Beloved' to be inscribed on her murdered daughter's tombstone presupposes the conviction of a mother who wants her daughter to rest peacefully wherever she is:

> The welcoming cool of unchiseled headstones; the one she selected to lean against in tiptoe, her knees wide open as any grave. Pink as a fingernail it was and sprinkled with glittering chips. Ten minutes, he said. You got then minutes I'll do it for free. Ten minutes for seven letters. With another ten she could have gotten "Dearly" too? She had not thought to ask him and it bothered her still that it might have been possible-that for twenty minutes, a half hour, say, she could have had the whole thing, every word she heard the preacher say at the funeral (and all there was to say, surely) engraved on her baby's headstone: Dearly Beloved (p.5).

Conclusion

The community or society played a key role in defining the characteristics of who a mother was. Despite the importance of its role in the lives of Linda and Sethe, these women took on a form of radical mothering, presumptuously female empowered in the fight for the survival of their children to avoid being enslaved. These took different forms as bad mothering and were misinterpreted by the community at large.

Amongst their mothering dexterity was embracing anthropomorphic identities in a quest to protect their children. Linda Brent and Sethe "became" animals not only to themselves, but to the community. The effects of this change went a long way in affecting their relationships with others and even the children they were protecting.

Linda Brent and Sethe, therefore, challenge the stereotypical concept of motherhood and deviate from the dominant view of the definition of a mother being one who only protects her children from harm, but defines a mother as one who has the ability to ensure her children endure pain and

sometimes, death to express or confirm their love for them. These two characters define the term ‘mothering’ in ways which is stereotypical of the African-American women who went through the era of slavery and its aftermath.

CHAPTER FIVE

EXAMINING MOTHERING: RACE AND ABJECTION IN WILSON'S *OUR NIG* AND WALKER'S *THE COLOR PURPLE*

"Well", say Sofia, "I was so use to sitting up there next to her teaching her how to drive, that I just naturally clammed into the front seat. She stood outside on her side…. the car clearing her throat. Finally she say, Sofia, with a little laugh, This is the South. Yes ma'am, I say. She clear her throat, laugh some more. Look where you sitting, she say. I'm sitting where I always sit, I say. That's the problem, she say. Have you ever seen a white person and a colored sitting side by side in a car, when one of them wasn't showing the other one how to drive it or clean it?" (The Color Purple, p.104).

Introduction

The previous chapter analysed the characters Linda Brent in Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the life of a slave girl* and Sethe in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and how they challenged the master narrative as well as assumed both paternal and maternal identities in protecting their children. Their resistance took various forms and have been thematised in four different ways, namely, othermothering, bad and good mothers, anthropomorphic tendencies and, society's perception.

In focusing on Walker's *The Color Purple* and Wilson's *Our Nig*, this chapter discusses the black mother characters and how they deal with racial segregation and abjection as freed people, as well as the children they bear and how the children survive race and abjection in the society. The chapter further discusses the components of abandonment, step-fathers, religion and society which make up race and abjection in the two novels. By employing the terminology "freed people," I imply the era of freedom when slavery has been abolished and Black mothers are allowed or made to live anywhere they want and do whatever pleases them. The idea of freed people in this context is

related to the Congress established in March 1865 which established the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands and which supervised humanitarian efforts by feeding and clothing destitute blacks, establishing schools, and founding hospitals. In this chapter, the analysis will focus on Frado in *Our Nig* and Celie in *The Color Purple*.

These two characters are justifiably used because the novels are set in the era when chattel slavery no longer exists, but black people go through segregation and abjection in the communities. The black people are considered inferior to the whites and certain lowly characteristics and demeaning jobs are attached to them. The black people are thus segregated in terms of where they live, their occupations, schools and even way of dressing. These two characters, Frado and Celie, are victims of circumstances or decisions taken by their freed mothers who are expected to know better and stand for what is right for their children. The victimisation will affect them all their lives, both as daughters and as mothers themselves.

The Color Purple by Alice Walker focuses on two sisters, Celie and Nettie, who grow up together but are separated due to the diabolic nature of their stepfather, who wants to rape both sisters. Celie, the elder of the two, who is married off at a very tender age narrates her life in letters to God and her sister, Nettie, who has relocated to Africa, and describes all the horrors she goes through as a mother and a wife.

Wilson's *Our Nig* is about a young woman, Frado, who is abandoned by her mother at a very tender age to a white family, the Bellmonts, and the problems and abuses she faces as a result of being a mulatto. She finally leaves the place after so many years and gets married to an ex-slave and has a

child. These novels facilitate my response to the research question: In what ways racial segregation and abjection help define mothering amongst women in black communities? This analysis is an attempt to answer the research question on race and abjection in relation to mothering amongst women in the black community. The focus of this analysis, therefore, is to critically examine the mothers and their children in the novels *Our Nig* by Harriet Wilson and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker as black women who lived in societies surrounded by racism and abjection.

In describing race, Richard Delgado and Jean Stefanic (2000) describe identity as being ordinary and not aberrational. This means identity is an everyday activity which is difficult to address except where the concepts of equality is vividly spelled out. This definition brings to the fore the idea of the segregation between the whites and the blacks which is evident in both novels under study. In defining abjection, I employ Kristeva (1982) who is of the view that it is neither lack of cleanliness nor health that causes abjection but rather what disturbs identity, systems and order. To her, abjection does not respect borders, positions, rules, etc. Based on these concepts and definition, I analyse the two novels by Wilson and Walker.

Abandonment by Mothers

The issue of racial segregation is constructed and poignantly revealed through various issues. The first issue to be discussed is the idea of abandonment by mothers which is linked to poverty. The issue of poverty is closely associated with women in the two novels. Black women are always poor due to lack of education and the unconscious quest of mothering which inhibit them from seeking for more profitable ventures. In the quest to

alleviate themselves from poverty, the mothers of Frado and Celie abandon them to fend for themselves. Frado's mother abandons her to a white family whilst Celie's mother dies and leaves her together with her siblings. The idea of abandonment by these two women is implicated by a literal death and an actual death. This idea of death is supported by the novel which confirms that Frado never came across her mother again even though she had the hope that one day she would be reunited with her. The idea of never meeting her mother again signifies the end to the relationship and bond they never had together. The literalness of this death is evident in the psychological state of the child. Hence, though Frado might never have voiced her feelings and emotions towards her mother for abandoning her, psychologically, she erases all memories of her mother so she can forget her, move on and progress in life. The idea of shutting her mother out of her life is captured in the following passage:

> Why the impetuous child entered the house, we cannot tell; the door closed and Mag hastily departed. Frado waited for the close of day, which was to bring back her mother. Alas! It never came. It was the last time she ever saw or heard of her mother. (p.23).

In Celie's case, though her mother physically dies, it will be inadequate to ignore the fact that before her mother's death, she had "cussed" her (Celie). She writes, "Dear God, My mama dead. She die screaming and cussing. She scream at me. She cuss at me… she ast me bout the first one Whose it is? I say God's…Finally she ast Where it is? I say God took it." (p.2) The screaming and "cussing" are because Celies's mother is aware of the amorous happenings between her husband and her daughter Celie but is refusing to discuss it with anybody. She is aware that her husband is taking advantage of

her ill health to rape her daughter. She, therefore, vents her anger on her daughter through the screaming and "cussing" even though she knows the fault is not from her daughter.

Interference of Step-fathers

It is important to note that the interference of step-fathers in the lives of these characters is another factor that does them more harm than good. These men are in no way kind towards their step-daughters. Frado's step-father, Jim, an African, encourages her mother to abandon her at an age when most children begin to bond with their parents. It is assumed that his advice to Frado's mother concerning the abandonment is to enable them (himself and Frado's mother) have enough time for each other without any interference whatsoever from a highly exuberant child. It is quite intriguing to realise that a mother would abandon her only daughter and refuse to look back ever. This advice by the step-father initiates the entire plot of the story of Frado as well as her life. It is obvious that the bond between the two is strained even at that young age. The step-father, in my opinion, does not have any affection for her and as such is able to channel his nonchalant feelings towards the girl through her mother.

It can be argued from one perspective that Frado is hated by her own mother because she is a mulatto who does not fit wholly into any of the two recognised societies; the black or the white. She is a product of the two opposing societies and as such cannot lay claim to belong to any of them. According to Ernest (1994), cultural identity is maintained at the expense of an individual's moral character; hence, though Mag Smith, the mother of Frado who is also a white woman repents of her prejudice, she remains an

outsider and Frado becomes the outcome of the transgressions. She is, therefore, the cultural product who is defined before birth. This identity eventually finds its way on the title page as *Our Nig*. Ernest opines that Frado is a victim of both an oppressive culture as well as her experiences. It is of interest to note that Mag Smith, mother of Frado, after the death of Frado's father, whom she married willingly, marries another black man. Therefore, it can be established that the idea of racism on the part of Mag Smith pertains not to the men she marries, but to the children she has. It is interesting, therefore, to note that the issue of racism does not only pertain to the society but also in some instances, from mother to child in the case of Mag Smith and Frado and also among the blacks themselves. This idea of intra-racism in the novel extends to the step-fathers as well. Their cases challenge O'Reilly's assertion that:

> In a racist culture that deems black children inferior, unworthy, and unlovable, maternal love of black children is an act of resistance; in loving her children the mother instills in them a loved sense of self and high esteem, enabling them to defy and subvert racist discourses that naturalise racial inferiority and commodify blacks as other and object. (p.11)

The mothers of these two characters do not attempt in any way to provide sufficient love to them or instill in them these acts of self and high esteem. The racist discourses are dominant in their own households, and as such there is no need to search for them elsewhere. Even at home where there is to be love and care and show of affection, Celie and Frado are made to feel less important and a burden to their families because their mothers do not inculcate in them the love and affection needed in a household setting.

Celie's step-father treats her badly when he rapes and gets her pregnant at a very tender age of fourteen. The death of Celie's mother marks the beginning of adulthood for Celie as she takes on the role of a mother to her siblings and a 'wife' to her step-father. Her two babies both disappear mysteriously leaving her to imagine that one is killed, and the other, sold. Celies's step-father finally marries her off to 'Mr_ and describes her to Mr._, according to Celie, as:

> She ugly. He say. But she ain't no stranger to hard work. And she clean. And God done fixed her. You can do everything just like you want to and she ain't gonna make you feed it or clothe it… Fact is, he say, I got to git rid of her. She too old to be living here at home… (p.8).

It is not surprising that Alphonso, Celie's step-father, illegally inherits the house in which they live from Celie's father and indirectly evicts the dead man's children from the place. By marrying Celie off and by attempting to have sexual affair with Nettie, Celie's younger sister, Alphonso, chases both children out of their rightful house. It is only years later that the truth comes to light and Celie together with her sister Nettie are able to rightfully own the house after his death.

It is significant to note, therefore, that the step-fathers of both Celie and Frado maltreat them. Considering the period of freedom, where blacks also have access to free education, it is significant to note that these girls are not put through school by their step-fathers. Instead, they are tagged with derogatory names and looked down upon by their step-fathers. Celie is continuously raped by her step-father which affects her both physically and psychologically. The freed man, specifically the African-American man, is not exceptional with regard to rape. The issue of rape is a universal phenomenon.

I do not, therefore, in any form connect the psyche of the African-American man raping his step-daughter to any trauma experienced during slavery. The African-American man under slavery would kill to protect his kind, especially the females. It is at this point that I agree with Freud in what he refers to as the "pleasure principle". This principle has been defined as the desire of instantaneity of satisfaction of instinctual drives and which ignores both moral and sexual boundaries. It is the ignorance of the sexual boundaries by the unconscious mind and instinct that propels the act of rape between a step-father and a step-daughter.

It can be argued that all these forms of maltreatment, be it physical or psychological, stem from the fact that their mothers helplessly look on whilst all these happenings are ongoing. The refusal of these mothers to stand up for their children might be based on the reason that there is the fear of losing these men who had agreed to marry them after the deaths of their husbands. This, therefore, raises the question whether these mothers looked on helplessly because there were not enough "quality" African-American men in the society or did they sacrifice their daughters for the phallus? Mag Smith, Frado's mother, who is white, is shunned by the white society because of her association with a black man and her pregnancy. She welcomes another man after the death of her husband Jim. It is this new husband, also a black man, who advises her to leave Frado behind and journey with him to seek greener pastures.

Similarly, Celie's father is lynched by a white mob, a situation which leaves her mother deranged and ostracized by the community because the community does not want to associate with the wife of a man who has issues

with the white community. This ostracism continues until the arrival of Alphonso who marries and stays with her till her death. The marriage to Alphonso is a mark of acceptance and care by at least one person in the community. Its significance is of immense importance to Celie's mother. The fear, therefore, of being neglected by him like the rest of society makes her vulnerable to the control of her husband, resulting in her inability to protect her children. It is worth clarifying that these women embrace the new men in their lives wholeheartedly even to the detriment of their own children because of the assurance of love demonstrated by these men which caters for their emotional well-being as well as the economic and the physical assurances added to it. These vulnerable women, both illiterates and poor, relieve their roles and duties to the men they marry due to the psychological stigmatisation they endure from the society over time: being a Black mother without a husband. Therefore, the step-fathers assume hegemonic roles over the households and play very important but negative roles in the lives of their step children. It must be noted, therefore, that children like Frado and Celie not only face abjection in the society, but right within their homes in the forms of their step-fathers who call them "black devils", "ugly" and all sorts of names which is a hallmark for identifying black people in the communities whilst their mothers helplessly look on.

Religion as Source of Comfort

Another important issue to discuss under the issue of racism and abjection is religion. Religion plays a very important role in the lives of both Frado and Celie and is a very substantive issue with regards to racism. Frado seeks solace in God right from the moment she learns to read and dedicates

most of her time to read the Bible and attending church meetings. She expresses such love in God and this is obvious in her active involvement in church activities and the things of God. She also expresses her hatred for God at a particular point in time when she has a conversation with James, a son of Mr. and Mrs. Bellmont:

> "Who made me so?" "God", answered James
> "Did God make you?" "Yes"
> "Who made Aunt Abby?"
> "God"
> "Who made your mother?"
> "God"
> "Did the same God that made her make me?"
> "Yes."
> "Well, then, I don't like him"
> "Why not?"
> "Because he made her white, and me black. Why didn't he make us both white?" (p.60)

The conversation between Frado and James signifies the essence of religion in the politics of colour. It also buttresses the importance of Celie's fear and outburst. Frado expresses her hatred for God because of being coloured. The purpose of the hatred is not in the colour per se, but in the observations she has made with regard to Black people and religion. She is also of the view which is expressed through her attitude and thoughts that religion is for the White man and no matter how hard she attempts, she (a Black person) would in no way be associated with heaven which is for religious people. Though she reads the Bible daily and religiously, she has no confidence in going to heaven like all those around her. Though she feels she loves God, she is so unsure of many tenets of the religion. Her thoughts on heaven reveal her inconsistency with whatever she is doing:

> Her doubt was, is there a heaven for the black? She knew there was one for James, and Aunt Abby, and all the good white

> people, but was there any for blacks? She had listened attentively to all the minister said, and all Aunt Abby had told her; but then it was all for white people (p.73).

The level of abjection of the Black people concerning the religion is vividly spelled out in the mind of Frado. The Black person is relegated to the background in church and scarcely mentioned. It is, therefore, very easy to assume that salvation is for only the whites or all persons. If heaven is for the white, why did God hate her so much as to make her black? Her hatred for God can be justifiably argued from her standpoint. To sum up her argument, there is no essence of making a person black if only whites would be allowed in heaven. To compound her insecurity as pertaining to heaven, Mrs. Bellmont, her guardian discusses with Mr. Bellmont about Frado's consistency in going to church. She says:

> I have let Nig go out to evening meetings a few times, and if you will believe it, I found her reading the Bible today, just as though she expected to turn pious nigger, and preach to white folks. So now you see what good comes of sending her to school (p.74).

Mrs. Bellmont voices the fear inhibiting Frado all this while. She does not expect a black person reading the Bible to become pious, not to talk about preaching salvation to the white. It has to be vice versa according to Mrs. Bellmont. Frado's consistent attendance to church services is abominable to Mrs. Bellmont who does not believe in educating the black person.

Celie, on the other hand, writes her feelings and thoughts to God at the initial part of the novel. She seeks solace in writing to God. Her strong belief in God as a confidante is expressed in her letters. All her letters begin with "Dear God" to signify how emotionally close she feels God is to her. According to Priya K (2014), Celie's "only confirmation of existence to

herself is the letters initially written to God both in hope and hopelessness" (p.52). Her trust in and self-reliance on God is portrayed in her telling God about how she feels, what she thinks and how she thinks. To her, the ability to spell the word God is an achievement and an assurance of some sort. To her therefore, "Never mine, never mine, long as I can spell G-o-d I got somebody along" (p.17). This indicates the reliance on and commitment of Celie to God at the beginning of the novel. This is frequent in the novel as Celie shows so much love and dedication to God till the latter part of the novel. After learning all that there is to know about her late father and late mother, her affection for God takes another dimension. She accuses God of all the bad happenings in her life and likens God to man. She says:

> What God do for me? I ast…Yeah, I say, and he give me a lynched daddy, a crazy mama, a lowdown dog of a step pa and a sister I probably won't ever see again. Anyhow, I say, the God I been praying and writing to is a man. And act just like all the other mens I know. Trifling, forgetful and lowdown…Let 'im hear me, I say. If he ever listened to poor colored women the world would be a different place, I can tell you. (p.192)

The essence of Celie's blasphemous statement is an attempt to criticise and draw God's attention to the fact that she has been ill-treated because of her colour. There is a dramatic dialectical change in her psychology: from loving God to hating God. This can be attributed to maturity. Celie has matured and psychologically grown as a character as compared to how she was presented at the beginning of the novel. She is, thus, presented as a dynamic character who undergoes changes as the plot of the story unfolds. Her growth is accounted for on the basis of experience whilst living with her husband and her interactions and relationships with other characters. As Faurar (2011) puts it:

> The interrelation between the individual and the whim of locations Celie is subjected to is meaningful in the sense that the spaces that Celie occupies have the power to bring about redemption. Therefore, the spaces she experiences, either domestic, spiritual or indulged in fantasies, although eliciting inhumane experiences, they also represent an essential means to convey the engulfing element of transformation which integrates physical healing and spiritual salvation (p.494).

Celie is of the view that maybe God would have made her life much easier if she had been of another colour. The acceptance of being a poor coloured woman is an important identification observed by Celie. This blasphemous announcement by Celie comes out after so many years of staying faithful and writing to God almost every day. It is obviously a turning point for a woman like Celie to make such pronouncements. The life of a coloured woman is one that requires so much yet, given less. In terms of education, power, mothering as well as working, the Black woman feels woefully inadequate as compared to her fellow woman who is a White. Celie is asking for equality between the White woman and the Black woman from God. In buttressing this point, I refer to Araujo and Schneider (2017) who are of the view that Mrs. Bellmont is observed to be the aggressive, abusive figure in the household though she is a woman. They agree with Leveen (2001) who argues that the Bellmont house follows the imperatives of slavery and challenge the notion of white female authority by showing how unjust and aggressive a white woman in a position of power can be in relation to a Black woman. (p.200)

Celie's strong belief in God and His abilities give her the courage to ask such a question. She represents the black woman, in what she stands for and what she inwardly seeks. Religion at this moment, therefore, becomes a tool with which the Black woman seeks to curb the issue of abjection and

racism. To her, therefore, only God is responsible for stopping the racial canker. Thyreen (1999) asserts that the identity of God in the novel is reduced to a being identified with oppressive white patriarchy; hence, the reason why Celie addresses her letters to God. This is because she is ashamed of speaking directly to Him. The idea of God being reduced to oppressive white patriarchy, I agree to the extent that Celie displays that thought in the latter part of the novel when she refers to God as a man and displays her disappointment in Him. The other part which talks about Celie addressing her letters to God because of being ashamed speaking directly to Him is arguable to the extent that the whole idea of writing instead of speaking is a form of discourse for a suppressed individual. Her suppressed nature which is explained through oppression, sexual exploitation and physical abuse she undergoes is confined in her letters to God. She writes to God not because of shame but because she is lonely and suppressed and therefore finds it therapeutic to write.

The concept of religion is very important to the Black community. Frado and Celie, for instance, take solace, consolation and peace from their association with God through writing and reading. They are of the view that God alone is responsible for the life and plight of the Black woman and as such He alone can make things better or worse for them. To sum this interpretation up, I recall Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* when he says:

> A belief in fatality removes all blame from the oppressor; the cause of misfortunes and of poverty is attributed to God: He is Fate. In this way the individual accepts the disintegration ordained by God, bows down before the settler and his lot, and by a kind of interior restabilisation acquires a stony calm. (p.55).

In conclusion, when God fails, He is likened to a common man or a racist. At other times, God is hated for the role He plays. The effect of racism, therefore,

on religion is akin to that of the prejudice of whites against the blacks in the society.

The Role of Society in Race and Abjection

The role of society is another key factor in analysing the issue of race and abjection. Though both Frado and Celie find themselves in a free community, they are still victimised because of their colour. Frado has her share of the abjection right from the moment she sets foot in the Bellmont house. Her name becomes Nig, shortened form of the word 'Nigger'. She is reminded of her colour every day of her life and made aware of not being in any way equal to the whites who have been kind enough to provide her with shelter. Leeven (2001) purports that the sub title of the novel "*Sketches from the Life of a free Black, in a Two-Story White-House, North. Showing that Slavery's shadows fall even there"* gives the novel a set of both relations and disjunctions. To her, therefore, the identity "nig" though assigned to a free black seems odd. The use of *Our Nig* itself indicates a collectively owned object rather than a self-owned subject. (p.562):

> She is ostracised during dinner time, and in the night, given a strange place to sleep. "Where would she sleep" asked Mary. "I don't want her near me". "In the L chamber," answered her mother. "How'll she get there?" asked Jack. "She'll be afraid to go through that dark passage, and she can't climb the ladder safely." "She'll have to go there; it's good enough for a nigger," was the reply (p.51).

The various racist remarks by Mrs. Bellmont and her daughter Mary are clear indicators that they are not ready to accommodate or feel comfortable getting themselves involved with a black person. The incessant attributes and insults meted out to her represents the notion of the black being inferior in all aspects compared to that of a white person in a society. Farber (2014) likens *Our Nig*

to a slave narrative and argues that the only deviation of the novel from the conventions of a slave narrative is that the level of oppression in *Our Nig* is through racism and not slavery.

With regard to education, the Bellmonts argue over whether to send Frado to school or not. This is because Mrs. Bellmont is of the view that there is no sense in attempting to educate people of colour who are incapable of elevation. Even at her tender age, Frado recognizes that she is going through all the hardships at the Bellmont house because of her colour. She thus remarks:

> "Oh! Oh! I heard, "Why was I made? Why can't I die? Oh, what have I to live for? No one cares for me only to get my work. And I feel sick; who cares for that? Work as long as I can stand, and then fall down and lay there till I can get up. No mother, father, brother or sister to care for me, and then it is, You lazy nigger, lazy nigger-all because I am black! Oh, if I could die!" (p.69).

The colour of a person, when reiterated over a period of time in a negative way, influences the person in one way or the other. This is exactly how Frado feels after incessantly being called Nig by her guardian. The name Nig may not have had any implications on her, but the abuses that follow indicate that being of such a colour has its negative appeal. According to Kocsoy (2013), the title of the novel signifies racism and not affection. The dualities in the title and descriptive subtitle are evident as the words are juxtaposed to create the dualities of Nig/ Free Black, Free Black/ White house and North/ Slavery's Shadows. These represent the contradictions of racist ideologies of the North. Though it is essential to note that not everyone in the house refers to her as Nig or abuses her, the impact made by Mrs. Bellmont and her daughter, surpasses all the love and affection shown her by Mr. Bellmont, James and

Aunt Abby. This is because the acts of abuse together with the name Nig become one and complement each other:

> "She ast me Who is my husband, now I know all bout hers. She laugh a little. I say Mr._. She say, Sure nuff?
> Like she know all about him. Just didn't know he was married. He a fine looking man, she say. Not a finer looking one in the county… We sure do thank you for your hospitality. She laugh again, look at the horses flicking flies off they rump. Horsepitality, she say. And I git it and laugh. It feel like to split my face." (p.15).

Celie, on the other hand, meets the woman who adopted her daughter and strikes a conversation with her. Unlike most white people that the other characters meet in the novel, this woman is very friendly and hospitable. She answers Celie's questions and chats heartily with her. This may be interpreted as a switch in norm, considering how other black characters in the novel are stigmatised and face abjection. This act of kindness may also be interpreted to be the role being played by the woman's husband. He is a priest and as such taught to embrace and love all humankind. This woman may, therefore, just assume her role as a reverend minister's wife who is supposed to be tolerant and accommodating. Though Celie lives in a society which accommodates both the whites and blacks, she does not encounter any racial subjugation. Whatever she encounters that is deemed as racism comes from her household and amongst her own people.

Conclusion

The issues of race and abjection in the two novels provide enough evidence that the African-American women writers found the need to narrate how women survived both crises in the form of oppression. This oppression is an essential group experience for blacks. As posited by Kristeva (1982), the

idea of abjection is immoral, sinister, scheming and shady. The oppression of being treated unfairly because of one's colour becomes a canker which characters like Celie and Frado go through every day of their lives, not only as children of black parents but also as black children in the community. It is essential to note that racism and abjection run through the African-American women's personal lives, society, religion, education, poverty, as well as discourses.

CHAPTER SIX

THEORIZING BLACK MOTHERING: THE ROAD TO MATRIARCHY

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the issues of race and abjection in Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* and Alice Walker's *Color Purple* by focusing on the characters Frado and Celie. The chapter explored how these two characters mothered and nurtured their children during the period of freedom and the period of racial segregation. This exploration was discussed under four themes, namely; abandonement of children by mothers, interference of step-fathers, religion as a source of comfort and the role of society. It was concluded that racism and abjection run through every aspect of the African-American woman's life.

This chapter seeks to derive from the lives of the black women in question a structural formulation of motherism to serve as a framework within which most black women's lives and angst can be analysed**.** The chapter answers the research question: In what ways does the ambivalent nature of mothering in the four novels theorize black mothering? All the four novels under study will be considered to authenticate the idea of theorizing black mothering which this chapter seeks to do. The focus is to employ all the main women characters considered as mothers while concentrating on the ambivalence in which they operate as black mothers. In an attempt to portray the ubiquity of mothering in all the three eras under study, this chapter reviews a range of concepts used by black women theorists. These include: othermothering, motherline, matrifocality, and motherwork. This chapter adds

to the plethora of conceptual frameworks by introducing a new concept: "motherhate.". My framework is an attempt towards a theory of black motherhood. This chapter focuses on two major women characters from each of the four novels under study: Sethe and Baby Suggs in *Beloved*, Linda and her grandmother in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Celie and Nettie in *Color Purple* and Mag Smith and Frado in *Our Nig*. These women characters play very important roles and contribute to the progress of the plots of the four novels under study. They are all major characters and serve different but important and sometimes symbolic purposes in the novels.

Terminologies on Mothering

The concept of mothering has been given many sub terms including othermothering, matrifocality, and motherline, to argue out the specificity of the nature of mothering being undertaken at a particular point in time. These terminologies have necessitated the style as well as the ideology in which many African-American women writers portray their experiences and emotions in their novels. The first of these sub-terminologies is the concept of othermothering which is a unique idea of mothering to the African-American people as well as Africans. As has been defined by Stanlie James (1999) and quoted by O'Reilly (2004), "Othermothering is the acceptance of responsibility for a child who is not one's own, in an arrangement that may or may not be formal" (p.5). This practice of othermothering brings to therefore the umbilical bond between Africans and African-Americans. This cord is as a result of the belief that the practice of othermothering is traced from some parts of Africa, and believed to be retained by the African-Americans as it suits their situations as slaves in a new world. The issue of othermothering is

essential to the fulfillment of the goals to increase the black population and to have more of their own at all cost.

The centrality of this concept is discussed through the literary and critical texts of African-American women writers. The depiction of female characters such as Baby Suggs (*Beloved*), Molly (*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*), Celie and Nettie (*Color Purple*) attests to the fact that the eras of slavery, emancipation and freedom in the African-American history do not in any way break the phenomenal ideal of mothering known as othermothering. The issue of grandmothers' and great-grandmothers' othermothering their grandchildren or great-grandchildren due to the absence of the child's or children's parents is a very distinct aspect of othermothering in African-American history. Baby Suggs, Sethe's mother-in-law, played a very important othermothering role in the survival of Sethe's children when she was away from the children on two occasions: during her flight to freedom and when she was jailed for infanticide. Similarly, Linda Brent's grandmother, Molly, served as both mother and grandmother to Linda and her children. As a mother, she nurtured and raised both Linda and her brother Benjamin when their parents died. She became a confidante, a disciplinarian, a counselor and a friend to Linda as she grew up. As a grandmother, she cared and nurtured Linda's children when Linda abandoned her children to go into hiding. These were crucial times in the lives of their grandchildren and great-grandchildren as negligence on the part of these women would have been disastrous. In discussing othermothering, it is essential to note that this system worked for these women of colour in all the periods of slavery, flight and freedom and sustained the children around them, whether they were related to these women

or not. From the evidence above, it is obvious that the African-American community not merely upholds but also canonizes the practice of othermothering. The valorization of the practice reflects in the centrality of the notion in many works by African-American women writers.

The second terminology discussed is matrifocality. According to O'Reilly, this terminology is explained by Miriam Johnson (1990), as among other things, that which does not only refer to domestic maternal dominance, but also the prestige of the image of the mother, a role that is culturally elaborated and valued. Matrifocality is a notion that places premium on the position of mothers in society. The concept positions mothers as the fulcrum around which social organization, social productions, agency and development swing. According to Patricia Hill Collins (1993), the African-American practice of mothering differs from Eurocentric ideology in three important ways:

> First, the assumption that mothering occurs within the confines of a private, nuclear family household where the mother has almost total responsibility for child-rearing is less applicable to Black families. While the ideal of the cult of true womanhood has been held up to Black women for emulation, racial oppression has denied Black families sufficient resources to support private, nuclear family households. Second, strict sex-role segregation, with separate male and female spheres of influence within the family, has been less commonly found in African-American families than in White middle-class ones. Finally, the assumption that motherhood and economic dependency on men are linked and that to be a "good" mother one must stay at home, making motherhood a full-time "occupation," is similarly uncharacteristic of African-American families. (pp.43–44).

The ideal of matrifocality is embedded in each of the novels under study. Each of the women characters is recognized as a mother at a point in time despite the challenges and interruptions they face as mothers individually and

collectively. It is essential to admit that the society in which these mother characters find themselves firstly recognize, regard and accept them as mothers before condemning or chastising them for their acts of irresponsibility. These acts of murder and abandonment by which the characters, Sethe, Linda and Mag Smith, are condemned are not before the admittance of their ability to 'mother' children. By this term 'mother', I refer to the act of getting pregnant and being delivered of a baby. That process is the first phase of being called and regarded as a mother. As defined by Rich (2004), "motherhood is earned, first through an intense physical and psychic rite of passage - pregnancy and childbirth" (p.12). Not only do the mother characters in all the four novels portray dominance, but they also take pride in being mothers in the society. The terminology 'matrifocality' paves the way for the centrality of mothers in the novels as well as a literary discussion in the rest of the thesis. For example, in relation to the plot, the structure, the narrative point of view, characters, characterization, symbols, imagery etc. Sethe in *Beloved* singlehandedly ensures her flight as well as that of her children to freedom regardless of the absence of her husband at the last moment. She tells Paul D:

> He wasn't there. He wasn't where he said he would be…The underground agent said, By Sunday…Sunday came and he didn't. Monday came and no Halle. I thought he was dead…then I thought they caught him…then I thought, No, he's not dead because if he was I'd know it… (p.68).

The courage to do what she does in the midst of such a confused state attests to the notion of substantiating her prowess as a mother who can do without a male. Similarly, Linda's fight for her children from the onset is without the help of the children's father. Singularly, she fights and undertakes such

hazardous tasks and decisions to protect her children from being perpetual slaves. These women do not only get pregnant and produce children. They also become the centre in the lives of their children in the absence of their fathers. This display of boldness and assertiveness in the midst of danger, earmarks the general idea of matrifocality as discussed. Larson (1989) opines that the high status given to the position of mother in both the family and the society is what fashioned the basis of matrifocality. According to O'Reilly (2004):

> In African American culture, motherhood is the pinnacle of womanhood. The matrifocal structure of black families with its emphasis on motherhood over wifedom and black women's role as economic provider means that the wife role is less operative in the African American community and that motherhood is site of power for black women (p.10). Wifehood therefore is predicated on an atmosphere of stability which is at variance with the status of a slave.

In the case of the term, 'motherline', there are many branches. Motherline, according to Lowinsky (1994), are some forms of maps that are exchanged through oral tradition that the woman can refer to either for warning or encouragement. To others such as O'Reilly, the motherline in an African-American society is representative of ancestral memory and traditional values of African-American culture. Other scholars like Toni Morrison are also of the view that motherline signifies ancestral memory. To lump up all three different schools of thought, motherline is practically the same ideology of reference to older and more experienced individual mothers or the group of mothers or both. To the African-American, the uniqueness of their mothering is one and familiar to similar ideologies and experiences irrespective of the era in which it is found. Hence in slavery, flight or freedom, each of the characters

has a significant 'ancestor' she looks up to or reminisce about for empowerment.

This ancestor is not necessarily a dead person. An ancestor can also refer to a living being who is much older. Due to the nature of slavery, families are denied the chance to trace their families. As a result, the immediate is made to substitute for the past, hence the term 'ancestor'. To Sethe, it is her mother-in-law, Baby Suggs; to Linda, her ancestor is her grandmother, Molly; to Celie, it was her late mother and her sister Nettie and to Nettie, it is her sister Celie. The idea of a map consistently becomes obvious in the lives of these women as they progress in life. Willingly or unwillingly, their lives are marked with road maps made by certain women who may be alive or dead or those who physically or mentally or even emotionally, encourage them or warn them about the inconsistencies of life. The mode of oral tradition underlined in association with motherline cannot be overlooked. African-American women writers recognize the role oral tradition has played in the history of the African-Americans. There is an impact on the lives of slave women who could neither read nor write; therefore, the only mode of communication was through orality.

The last of the terms is "motherwork". According to O'Reilly (2004), Toni Morrison defines "motherwork" as a political enterprise that assumes its central aim the empowerment of children. Therefore, it is concerned about how mothers with children in a racist and sexist world protect and instruct them on how to protect themselves as well as challenge racism and teach their daughters sexism. This definition establishes the view that motherwork is characterized by three demands: preservation of their children, nurturing the

emotional and intellectual growth of their children, and finally, training and social acceptability of their children. To the African-American, these are, in sum, the duties of a mother. According to Collins (1994):

> Racial ethnic women's motherwork reflects the tensions inherent in trying to foster a meaningful racial identity in children within a society that denigrates people of color. . . [Racial ethnic] children must first be taught to survive in systems that oppress them. Moreover, this survival must not come at the expense of self-esteem. Thus, a dialectal relationship exists between systems of racial oppression designed to strip a subordinated group of a sense of personal identity and a sense of collective peoplehood, and the cultures of resistance extant in various ethnic groups that resist the oppression. For women of color, motherwork for identity occurs at this critical juncture. (p.57)

It is her obligation to work in her capacity as a mother to enable her children to achieve all these characteristics. These demands fit perfectly into the periods of slavery, flight, and freedom. During slavery, the most important and crucial demand amongst the women is the survival of their children, whether they are with them on the same plantation or sold. The thought of uncertainty as to whether a child is alive or dead is enough torture for these women, such as, Molly and Baby Suggs who both had their children sold. Nevertheless, these women othermothered their grandchildren defensively. In flight, Linda and Sethe ensure their children are alive and safe. Linda survives in the underground hole for almost seven years just for her children to survive, though there are times she wishes she could die. Similarly, Sethe, though tired from running and feeling very weak and defenseless and on the verge of dying, refuses to die though pregnant. These acts symbolically represent the important tasks these women undertake in order to preserve their generation. These women mask their identities for many years to protect the children they bear. In freedom, Mag Smith, in abandoning her daughter, ensures she

preserves her life by abandoning her in a home she knows Frado would be catered for.

This same sense of self-preservation instinct pushes Frado out into the world to find a job in order to cater for her child even though she is sick. Celie takes care of her siblings and later her step-children to the admiration of all. Nettie ensures her sister's children are well cared for all the time. I must reiterate that all three demands- preservation of children, nurturing the emotional and intellectual growth of children and training and social acceptability of children work hand in hand to a very large extent. In the attempt to self-preserve, the children consciously or unconsciously are emotionally and intellectually groomed. The need to survive requires intellectual prowess and so in the case of Sethe who sent her children ahead of her in flight, the ability of the children to survive without their mother till she returns is a perfect indication of how they have been groomed emotionally. In a similar case, the absence of Linda Brent to her children and their ability to survive for many years without her is an emotional feat for children that young. The ability of her son, Benjamin, to withhold such vital information of his mother's whereabouts from the others when he is asked about his mother, Linda, marks a very important psychological and emotional growth in the life of a child. In a similar manner, Celie's ability to tell Harpo, her stepson to reason up and stand up like a man challenges him to become a stronger version of himself and work hard to take care of his family.

In addition to the terms discussed, this research employs psychoanalytic feminism in creating an avenue for discussion and theorizing the concept of mothering. Therefore, using psychoanalytic feminism as a

benchmark, one of the many ideas behind mothering has been explained by Chodorow (1987) as one that is based on instinctual components. These instinctual components necessitated the murder of her child by Sethe the very last moment upon seeing School master coming towards her. According to Chodorow, "women have mothering instinct, or maternal instinct, and therefore it is "natural" that they mother, or even that they therefore ought to mother" (pp.21-22) It is this same instinct that makes Sethe recognize Beloved as her returned daughter when she set her eyes on her for the very first time seated on the stairs of 124. The instinctual component is a psychological manifestation which puts both mothers and children at very uncompromising situations most of the time. Linda Brent in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* plays on her instinct by hiding for seven years. The significance of instincts by mothers in the texts under consideration is always to save their children. In Linda and Mag Smith's cases, the instinctual components took gradual processes in their establishment. There was the opportunity of thinking through what they wanted to do. The instinctual components can, therefore, be said to vary from character to character and from one circumstance to the other. Sethe's instinct was abrupt as compared to that of Linda and Mag. It should be observed that instincts are essential in the lives of black mothers since they help them in making decisions as well as their day-to-day activities.

Rich (2004) defines motherhood, among other things, and identifies the first phase of motherhood as pregnancy and childbirth. Further, she makes mention of the second phase which is learning to nurture. This act of nurturance, she opines, does not come by instinct. This conflicts with the views of psychoanalytic feminists as discussed above about mothering or

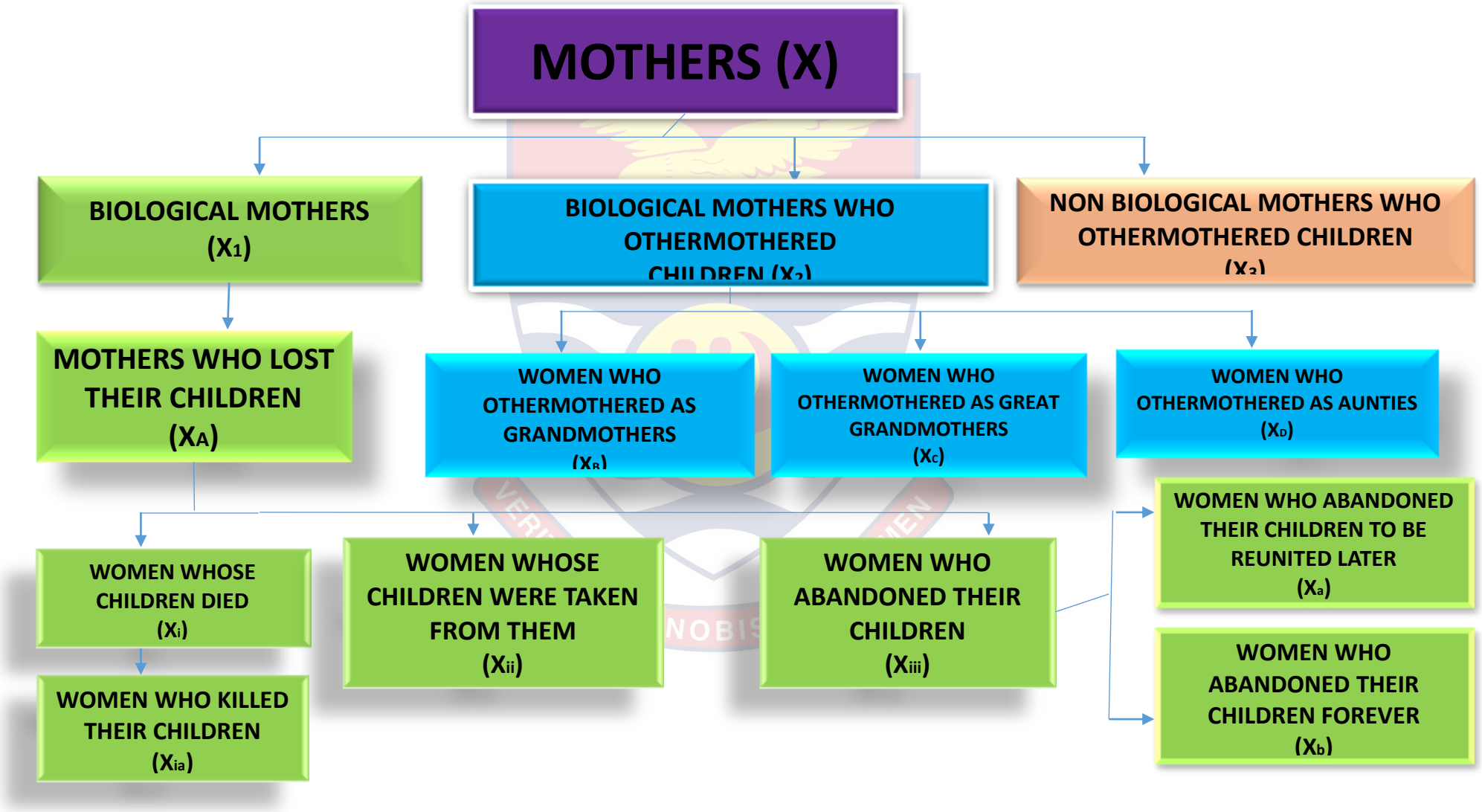
maternal instinct that says that mothering is based on instinctual components. I tend to lean towards the argument made by psychoanalytic feminists because I am strongly of the belief that the periods of slavery and flight especially did not give the slave mothers any opportunity to contemplate and decide how they should take decisions concerning their children. Decisions concerning nurturing their children always came with just enough pressure to rely on only their instincts.

Psychoanalysis feminists are also of the view that mothering is a natural rather than a social construct. Therefore, the practice of mothering and nurturing comes to a woman naturally. In view of the above, the issue of mothering, being self-empowered regardless of society's patriarchal mentality of how mothers behave comes into play. The nature of black mothering brings out the uniqueness and identity of the natural essence found in women who have gone through so many experiences. Pregnancy through childbirth to nurturance defines the natural pattern as opposed to social construct. It can be observed that most of the characters employed in the analysis, specifically seven out of eight are biological mothers: Sethe, Baby Suggs, Linda, Molly, Celie, Mag Smith and Frado. Psychoanalytic feminists further describe biological mothers as providing an almost exclusive care in nurturing.

In order to argue out and propose my terminology labelled 'motherhate', I will delineate the category of mothers and employ Vladmir Propp's structural concept to analyse the category. This will take the format of comparing the characters by isolating the major mother characters.

It should be noted, however, that the colour schemes for the diagram presented in this thesis are used solely for aesthetic purposes. They do not convey any

other meaning apart from the fact that each colour represents a different subset and therefore any variable(s) that has the same colour as that subset, is connected to the subset in the analysis.



For the purposes of this chapter, the women characters employed would be labelled as actants. This labelling is to intimate that they are performers of certain functions which classify them under a certain phenomenon called mothering. The primary roles they perform would also be identified as constants. According to Propp ([1928], 2003), both constants and variables are present in various stories. He explains further that names and attributes of dramatis personae change but that does not in any way influence the constant action or function. Therefore, the story attributes identical actions to various personages. This possibility makes the study of the tale based on the functions of its dramatis personae.

I will, therefore, use the novels under study and employ the various characters with different names and group them according to their actions as mothers. To buttress this assertion, Propp argues, "…it is possible to establish that characters of a tale, however varied they may be, often perform the same actions. The actual means of the realization of functions can vary and as such, it is a variable… But the function, as such, is a constant" (p.20). The variables converge and diverge in a form of a matrix which reveals how intricate the role of mothering is and how it varies over time and situations according to the individual actants and their variables under analysis. In analyzing the roles played by these actants, the actants will be given a universal umbrella known as mothers. This is represented by X. X, therefore, is the main factor for all the women who are considered mothers. This includes biological mothers, biological mothers who othermothered children, and non-biological mothers who othermothered children. To this effect, all the actants considered in this chapter are represented. X therefore is the ideal and only factor that brings all

the actants under one very big umbrella. It is therefore known as the constant. There are other subsets that fall under X. These subsets known as variables will be represented with X_1, X_2 and X_3. Biological mothers are categorised under the variable X_1. The actants in the X_1 category include Sethe and Baby Suggs (*Beloved)*, Linda and Molly (*Incidents in the life of a slave girl*), Celie (*Color Purple*), and Mag Smith and Frado (*Our Nig*) who make up seven out of the total of eight actants. The variable X_2 discusses biological mothers who also othermothered. These actants are Baby Suggs, Molly and Celie. It is interesting to note that out of these three actants, two of them othermothered in the capacity of grandmothers (Baby Suggs and Molly) and an additional role of great-grandmother (Molly), the other actant othermothered in the capacity of a step mother (Celie). These variables have been labelled X_B, X_c and X_D respectively. X_3 represents women who are not mothers biologically but othermothered. In this instance, only Nettie can be mentioned as an actant. This structure is, therefore, a presentation of the major women characters found in the novels used. They are also representational of the theme of mothering found in this study.

The present analysis places emphasis on the variable which has the most actants, and therefore, the variable X_1 will be given the most attention. Breaking down X_1 further, concentration is given to biological mothers who lost their children. This category is labelled X_A and the description, therefore, narrows the number of women to six, namely, Sethe, Baby Suggs, Linda, her grandmother, Celie, and Mag Smith. In discussing how they lost their children, X_A is subsequently broken down into four more variables. This is to justify the fact that the actants involved did not lose their children in the same

manner. There are, therefore, the variables $X_{i,}$ $X_{ii,}$ and X_{iii} to explain and categorise how they lost their children. X_i therefore represents mothers who lost their children through the means of death. In this case there is Sethe who attempted to kill her own children but managed to kill only one, named Beloved. There is also Linda Brent's grandmother, Molly, who lost her daughter, being Linda's mother. Xi is broken down to give Xia which represents a category of mothers who killed their own children, and that is represented by Sethe. Xii represents mothers whose kids were taken away from them. These women had no say in the welfare of their children. Baby Suggs had her children taken away from her one after the other and even lost memory of some of them at a point in time. Linda Brent's grandmother also had her child taken away from her. Celie in *Color Purple* had her children taken away soon after they were born by her step-father. Lastly, X_{iii} represents women who abandoned their children in one way or the other. This category is further broken down into two because of the implications brought about by the action of abandonment. In this category, therefore, there are the variables X_a and X_b. X_a represents Linda who abandoned her children and hid underground for seven years in order to save her children from being sold.

On the contrary, Mag Smith, mother of Frado also abandoned her child and she represents $X_{b.}$ Mag Smith abandoned her only daughter, Frado, at the age of six. That decision to abandon her child cannot be compared to that of Linda, neither can it be compared to that of any of the actants who lost their children. Mag Smith's case is different because she did not place her child first in her decision. It can be argued that Mag Smith hated her child because of how she was repulsed by the community for associating with a black and

bearing a child out of that association. Mag Smith called her children "black devils", indicative of racism. It is surprising and uncertain whether she has been conditioned to adopt the discourse as proposed and used by all, regardless, thereby linguistically underscoring the importance of language as a tool of domination. In other words, maybe, she is ascribing a different meaning to same words or expressions in a racist context on her own children. She abandoned her child because she felt the need to move on in life and settle elsewhere. She felt her child would become a stumbling block for her and her new husband. It should be noted that right from the beginning of the structure above, all the actants performed their roles based on the need to protect their children in one way or the other except Mag Smith. The decision she takes changes the story line of most African-American women's writings with regards to mothering. In effect, Mag Smith's ability to turn away from her daughter without having to look back for even a second symbolically represents a skew in the diagram that has been provided. She represents a different kind of mother who performs for her own selfish gains though she falls under the category of mothers who abandon their children. Her act buttresses Propp's stance when he posits, "identical acts can have different meanings and vice versa" (p.21). Therefore, though her act is similar to that of Linda in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and makes them all a subset of the same variable, her feelings towards her child are that of hatred. She also prioritises herself as compared to what she sacrifices for her child. This is very unusual in African-American women's writings on stereotypical mothers.

It will be expedient to argue that Mag Smith may have this trait because of her White background, as revealed in the novel. She is a white

woman who marries a black man and has a baby for him. Her attitude toward her child Frado portrays the psychological impact having a mulatto child has on her. She calls her "black devil" (p.16), indicating her nonchalant feelings and attitude towards her own child. All these attitudes towards her child can be observed as hatred for a child she might never have dreamt of having in the first place. The child goes through both emotional and psychological apprehension as she awaits her mother's return each day of her life. This is aggravated by the abuses she receives in her new home where she works as a slave and a person of very little value. There is, therefore, the need to establish a name for this kind of mothering which diverges from the norm and I propose the term "motherhate."

Motherhate describes mothers who reject the maternal instinct of protecting their children regardless of the consequences but rather focus on the hatred they have for their children as well as their own selfish gains. This hate might not have any connection with the child's behavior; rather, it emits from the mother's consciousness and is revealed through her attitude towards her child. 'Motherhate', is the opposite of the terminology motherlove. Motherlove is used by many feminist scholars like O'Reilly. To them, motherlove is perceived as sensitive mothering as well as preservative love. Motherlove portrays the various approaches to which mothers express their love to their children. Motherhate is a manifestation of the attitude of a selfish mother who happens to be a biological one as such towards her child (ren). Motherhate foregrounds the insensitivity of a mother towards her child. This terminology "motherhate" does not fall under the normative ideology surrounding either mothering or motherhood. Motherhate is a different kind of

behaviour that is uncharacteristic of African-American behaviour and writing. It can be recognized as a representation of the complexity of human reaction to racism.

Motherhate also suggests that African-American female writings are not a simplistic class of writing which are all uniform in their projection of African-American life. The divergence of motherhate from mainstream notions and practice reflect the fact that African-American life is more complex than the writers habitually project. Mothering in African-American context is very different from that of the European and other contexts. It is interesting to note that the acts of Sethe and Linda can never be described as motherhate though there was so much risk involved and even death at a point on the part of Sethe. This is because the mere normative idea of a mother protecting her child (ren) by all means just for the benefit of the child, surpasses any other condition or explanation for the term mothering. There are certain constant roles that are manifested amongst all the other actants in the four novels discussed who are blacks. These roles by the various actants as well as their functions delineated, brings to bare the ideal concept of mothering in the African-American context.

From the structural representation above therefore, we can make some observations. First of all, there are three main categories of mothers in the African-American women's novels: Biological mothers, Biological mothers who othermother children, and Non-biological mother who othermother children. Secondly, most biological mothers lose their child (ren) in one way or the other. Thirdly, biological mothers who othermother other children do so in the capacity either as great-grandmothers, grandmothers or aunties. Finally,

biological mothers who lose their children are categorized into two. Those who lose them to reunite with them later, and those who lose them forever.

Conclusion

There are three main categories or actants established in the writings of African-American women writers. These are biological mothers, biological mothers who othermother children, and mothers without biological children who othermother children. The majority of the actants are biological mothers and, therefore, make up the most comprehensive category amongst the variables. It is, further, argued that the functions of these mothers though varied are, as Propp would put it, "stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled" (p.22). Therefore, though they are a variety of actants, their fates are alike in so many similar as well as divergent ways. This portrays the complex nature of mothering with regards to the African-American women's writings. The idea of matriarchy runs through the various novels under study and justifiably argues that the African-American woman writer upholds and promotes the idea of matriarchy; hence, their voicing it both subtly and harshly in their writings. This justification counters T.S. Elliot's biographical fallacy which argues that what the characters say or do does not necessarily reflect anything of the author's own values and judgement.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

Introduction

The previous chapter attempted to theorize the phenomenon of mothering amongst African-American women writers by employing all the novels involved in the present study. The chapter concentrated on two women characters each from the four novels. After discussing various terminologies used by the African-American women writers which included othermothering, matrifocality, motherline and motherwork, there was a structural representation and a proposed term known as 'motherhate', the opposite of 'motherlove'. It was concluded that the African-American women writers promote the idea of matriarchy in so many ways through their writings.

This is the final chapter of the thesis. It presents a summary of the pivotal issues raised, conclusions as well as the implications of the findings of this study. In addition, this chapter highlights the objectives, methodology and the synthesis of all the key ideas as well as the way forward for further research in the area.

Summary of Research

The aim of the study was to explore the unique concept of mothering amongst African-American women's writings across three periods: slavery, flight and freedom. Precisely, I set out to examine the interconnectivity amongst four African-American novels written by women, namely, Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig; or, Sketches from the Life of a Free Black, In a Two Story White House, North. Showing that Slavery's Shadow Fall even there* (1859), Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Alice Walker's

The Color Purple (1982), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987). These were carefully selected to reflect the periods under consideration.

This thesis is an attempt to explore a fraction of the discourses by African-American women in portraying black women who defy all odds in order to maintain their status as mothers. The exploration takes the form of narration of the experiences of African-American women and their roles of mothering in three memorable periods in the African-American history: During slavery, in flight as the period of escape and in freedom as freed slaves. It also reacts to various definitions of mothering and motherhood by different scholars.

To this end, the study employed an eclectic theoretical framework by focusing on psychoanalytic feminism and critical race theories. The psychoanalytic feminism theory was necessitated by the intent to look beyond the obvious explanations behind the motives and the actions plotted by the women or mother characters in the novels under study. The theory was also used to reinterpret the mother characters to portray the behavioural and psychological aspects, thus, bringing forth a trenchant critique as well as a balance in the readings. The critical race theory was applied to discuss the notion of race and the issues pertaining to it in the lives of the black mother. This theory was relevant because it highlighted the critical role of race in the formation of identity and relationship, amongst others, in American history and literary studies.

The work also employed a few concepts which were Propp's Morphology of Folktales (2003) and structuralism. The choice of these approaches stemmed from the concerns raised in the works. The study adopted

the qualitative research design which aims at deriving and interpreting meaning from words or texts and observable behavior. The study particularly employed content analysis in interpreting the texts. The study was organized into seven chapters.

The first chapter discussed the writer's background to the study, thesis statement, methodology, research questions, theoretical framework underlying the research, scope of the study, and organization of the thesis.

Chapter two was dedicated to reviewing the literature. It included the historical background on African-American women writers, biography of the African-American writers and synopses of their novels under study. There was also the reviewed works pertaining to the four novels. The chapter concluded that much of the reviewed scholarship provided a detailed account of 'motherhood' without considering the important notion of 'mothering' which is a differentiated extension of the generic concept of motherhood. This represents a significant gap in the scholarship on the African-American fiction. The chapter, therefore, was to contribute towards filling the critical gap and provide an analysis that highlights the centrality of 'mothering' in the social strata of the African-American novel.

Chapter three focused on the analysis. "Resisting the norm: The journey of maternal sacrifice in Morrison's *Beloved* and Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*", the chapter was in response to the first research question, "How do the mother characters in the novels resist the status quo set out by the community in protecting their children?"

Chapter four, titled "Examining mothering: Race and abjection in Wilson's *Our Nig* and Walker's *The Color Purple*" was in response to the

second research question, "In what ways do racial segregation and abjection help define mothering amongst women in the black communities?"

Chapter five was titled "Theorizing motherhood: The road to matriarchy." This chapter answered the third research question, "In which ways do the ambivalent nature of mothering in the four novels theorize black mothering?"

In pursuit of research question one, I employed Carby (1987), hooks (1982), Abbey and O'Reilly (1998), and Rich (2004), amongst other scholars, to analyse the characters in terms of their personalities, their unique ways of nurturing their children and their exclusive approaches in protecting them.

To respond to research question two, I employed the Critical Race Theory in discussing the two characters under the themes of abandonment by mothers, interference of step-fathers, religion as a source of comfort, and the role of society.

In discussing research question three, I employed the psychoanalytic feminism as well as Vladimir Propp's (1928) morphology of the folktale as analytical framework. I also employed structuralism to enable me to theorize motherhood.

Key Findings

Key findings were made as responses to the research questions. To facilitate my discussion, I shall re-state the research questions here:

1. How do the mother characters in the novels resist the master narrative set out by the community?
2. In what ways do racial segregation and abjection help define mothering amongst women in the black communities?

3. Which ways do the ambivalent natures of mothering in the four novels theorize black mothering?

Concerning question one, the study demonstrated that the term 'mothering', though not exclusive to the African-American community, is adopted by the African-American feminists to advance the idea of motherhood which is more aggressive, protective, and ferocious, and can only be linked to people who have experienced slavery. In the two novels discussed, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs and *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, the characters, Linda Brent and Sethe, respectively are introduced, using the concept of othermothering, a term borrowed from the ancestral West African traditions in helping their children survive the absurdities and perversions of slavery.

Another finding in the study was that Linda Brent (*Incidents in the life of a slave girl*) and Sethe (*Beloved*) challenge the stereotypical concept of motherhood, and countering the dominant view of the definition of a mother being one who only protects her children from harm but defined a mother as one who has the ability to ensure her children endure pain and sometimes death to express or confirm their love for them. These two characters, therefore, define the term 'mothering' in their own ways through their actions and inactions which are stereotypical of the African-American women who went through the era of slavery and its aftermath.

The study also found that among their mothering identity, both Linda Brent and Sethe were metaphorically transformed into animals through the actions of caving (Linda) and that of killing (Sethe) in order to protect their

children. Linda and Sethe "became" animals not only to themselves but also to the community.

Lastly, it was established that the community played a key role in defining the characteristics of a mother. Despite the importance of mothering role in the lives of Sethe and Linda, these women took on a form of radical mothering, presumptuously female empowered in the fight for the survival of their children to avoid being enslaved. These took different forms labelled as bad mothering and were misinterpreted by the community at large.

With regard to research question two, it was concluded that the novels under study were indeed hinged on race and abjection through the characters Frado (*Our Nig*) and Celie (*The Color Purple)*. This was evident through abandonment by the mothers, the roles of step-fathers, religion as a source of comfort and the role of society. The study found that the interference of step-fathers was a crucial factor in the lives of the characters Frado and Celie. The step-fathers assume hegemonic roles over the households and play negative roles in the lives of their step-children. By calling their step-children "Black devils" and "ugly", these men ensure their children face abjection and racism not only in the society, but also in the spaces they call home. Frado and Celie at a point in time took solace, consolation and peace from knowing God. There was, however, a deviation with the realization that a close association with God did not guarantee a change in colour or end the racism towards them.

The third research question attempted to theorize mothering. Using the feminist psychoanalysis and Vladimir Propp's Morphoology of the folktale, I proposed a terminology "Motherhate". This terminology is the opposite of a

widely accepted terminology called motherlove. Whereas motherlove is perceived as sensitive as well as preservative love, motherhate is the manifestation of the attitude of a selfish mother towards her child(ren). It foregrounds the insensitivity of a mother towards her child(ren). Motherhate is a terminology that does not fall under the normative ideology surrounding either mothering or motherhood. It is recognised as a representation of the complexity of human reaction to racism.

Implications of the Study

The research findings and conclusions established have implications for African-American Studies. What this study has sought to achieve in this direction is to illustrate how African-American women writers have been able to subtly and apparently establish or reflect in their literary works a unique way of motherhood which is peculiar to the African-American community.

Another implication is the contribution it makes to the scholarship on the four novels involved: *Beloved, Our Nig, Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* and *The Color Purple*. A plethora of critics have explored different aspects of these novels both individually and comparatively with regard to the phenomenon of mothering or motherhood, but analysis on mothering or motherhood which centres on all these four novels has been in contestation. This study has given room for a re-orientation on how African-American novels, especially written by women maybe read.

Lastly, this study adds to the vocabulary on the concept of motherhood, a term labelled "motherhate" which brings to bear another side of a mother and her ability to hate her own children. The study has created a

grammar of motherhate within the African-American novel. That the above is one of the objectives of the present study, makes the present work valid.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study examined mothering in African-American women's writings: slavery, flight, and freedom. Although it has analysed and discussed the various terms and concepts of mothering amongst African-American women's writings, I recommend a stylistic analysis on the language used by mothers in slavery, flight and freedom towards their children. This will throw more light on the linguistic intertextuality of African-American women's writings on the concept of mothering. I also recommend a further research on the concept of "Motherhate" in African-American texts.

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