

The subordination of black people in the United States Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*

Wajiran¹; Nur Alifah Septiani²

¹English Literature Department, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Indonesia

²Indonesian Literature Department, Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Indonesia

Corresponding author: wajiran@enlitera.uad.ac.id

Citation: Wajiran & Septiani, N. A. (2023). The subordination of black people in the United States Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved*. *Notion: Journal of Linguistics, Literature, and Culture*, Vol 5(1), p. 69-81. <https://doi.org/10.12928/notion.v5i1.7064>

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: 16 December 2022

Accepted: 6 May 2023

Keywords:

Black people

Human right

Social class

Stratification

White supremacy

ABSTRACT

This paper is aimed at discussing Morrison's novel, *Beloved* dealing with the issues of human discrimination in the United States. Morrison is a writer who voices human values through discussions on issues of discrimination due to ethnicity, race, and skin color, especially that conducted against black people. She was instrumental in fighting for civil and political rights for black people in the United States, especially in Ohio. This study involves the theory of genetic structuralism to understand the concept of white supremacy. This is intended to see the relationship between white supremacy with the issues of social discrimination in the context of black people in the United States depicted in the novel. The issue of race and social class has always stood out in various groups of people. Even though society has progressed the issues of race, religion, and skin color still cause intergroup conflicts due to various interests. As depicted in the novel, black people are generally side-lined and considered only half human. Consequently, black citizens in the United States are associated with slavery or manual labor).



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

I. INTRODUCTION

Toni Morrison is an African-American writer. As a writer of black descent her works cannot be separated from the socio-political struggles of American society. Morrison describes the social conditions of a society full of injustice, especially against black people. Black people have a disadvantaged position in America and a lower social class because white people

Wajiran & Septiani, N. A.

The subordination of black people in the United States Toni Morrison's novel, beloved

perceive them as inferior (Swencionis, Dupree, & Fiske, 2017). Morrison's novels expresses the class struggle of black people to gain their dignity as autonomous and independent human beings (Herminingrum, 2010).

As a black writer, Morrison always advocated for human rights relating to black communities and was a very inspiring writer on these issues. According to Parker (2001), Morrison was a chronicler who presented a new perspective on American society. In addition to raising awareness on actual issues, Morrison also described people's lives in real terms (Parker, 2001). Furthermore, Parker stated that what Morrison described in the novel *Beloved* could be interpreted as the history of patriarchal values that intimidated black women. Parker's opinion was also supported by Morrison herself, as she was a writer who hoped her writings would impact socio-political change in the community, especially equality of human rights for black citizens in America. Morrison said:

I am a black writer struggling with and through a language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive "othering" of people and language which are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable in my work. My vulnerability would lie in romanticizing blackness rather than demonizing it; vilifying whiteness rather than reifying it. (Playing in the Dark x-xi) (Schur, 2004)

Morrison's statement clearly asserts that her intentions were reflected in her writing. The goal of her writing was to express the idea of equality between black and white people. In general, she tried to express her ideas on human rights issues in the United States. In other words, what is expressed in Morrison's literary work can be interpreted as an idea or insight into political conditions, especially regarding the social and political positions of black people in America. This statement is also similar to Ingle's (2007) who stated that the relationship between literature and politics cannot be seen directly, but an author with their expertise provides an understanding of politics that can be called "experiential as much as intellectual" (Ingle, 2007).

In several of her literary works, Morrison deals with civil rights, including issues related to the arbitrariness of the black slavery system. Morrison argued that slavery is an inhumane act that violates a person's civil rights and dehumanizes them. In the novel *Beloved*, Morrison described brutality and violence against black people, especially women who are trapped in slavery. White citizens considered black people non-human. As a result, the "master" could do anything to them.

What was depicted by Morrison in this novel is not merely imaginative. It is based on true story what was occurring in the past of American society. Melus etc. (2006) stated that what is reflected in African American literature cannot be separated from what is happening in society. As the literary work is the way of the author to reflect the history of the society especially that deal with black people. As a part of political identity of the author, Melus called it as "bears the etchings of history" (Melus & Tettenborn, 2006). That is why this novel is interesting to be discussed in the context of socio-political of the African people in the United States.

The novel *Beloved* has won several awards. In 1988, it was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in the United States (Hevesi, 1988). In 1987, *Beloved* was a finalist for the National Book Award. Additionally, it received the best-selling novel ranking from the New York Time

Wajiran & Septiani, N. A.

The subordination of black people in the United States Toni Morrison's novel, beloved

between 1981 and 2006. However, this novel is controversial among readers. Apart from being content against the status quo, *Beloved* failed to receive an award as the best novel at the National Book Award event in the United States. Some critics questioned why it was even placed as a finalist (Hevesi, 1988).

Apart from the content of the literary work, the author's background is interesting to discuss. Morrison was a black woman born in the Ohio district, United States. This district is very important in understanding the *Beloved*. As the novel took the setting also in Ohio. This can be interpreted that this novel explored about the life history or experience of the author in this district.

Two important positions influenced Toni Morrison's life. First, she was a woman. At the time, American society was still discriminatory against women. Women were considered second-class individuals. This condition was not only experienced by black but also by white women. Being a woman certainly affected her way of thinking and this is expressed in her work. Second, was also a black person. In America, black people are still considered non-human. Most black people at the time lived as slaves, not free individuals. Therefore, most of them were identified as violent, unskilled, poor, and uneducated. What is even more worrying is that slavery against black people is still considered natural.

The most important thing in Morrison's work is the human values presented in her literary works. Almost all of her literary works deal with issues of injustice, discrimination, intimidation and dehumanization. That is why Morrison has a very large contribution in relation to the struggle for identity politics or the struggle for minority politics. Morrison's immense contribution to human rights is recognized not only in the United States, but also around the world. In 1993, Toni Morrison received the Nobel Prize in literature. Receiving this award provides clear evidence of her enormous influence in the world of American literature, especially African-American literature.

Based on this extraordinary achievement, this study seeks to understand how Toni Morrison presented global issues about humanity through her literary works. This research focuses on one of her novels, which deals with slavery during the civil war. In this novel, many issues related to human rights are depicted from the lens of slavery that existed in the United States during the civil war, especially in the Ohio district, which was the birthplace of Toni Morrison.

Social life is filled with problems of social class. Social class is formed naturally due to various factors. One of them is heredity, which is determined by one's lineage, such as aristocratic or royal descent, ethnicity, race and beliefs or religion. These factors are not easily changed and sometimes even impossible to change. It is impossible for people from certain ethnic groups to eliminate their ancestral backgrounds. Perhaps they concealed their tribal origins by way of marriage, and even then, it took a very long time to change. This does not guarantee that the community will not recognize its tribal origins. While aspects of beliefs can change, the process of change in this case is difficult.

Meanwhile, the factor that most often forms a new social class is the economy. Social status obtained from economic factors is attainable to everyone irrespective of ethnicity and

Wajiran & Septiani, N. A.
The subordination of black people in the United States Toni Morrison's novel, beloved

race. This economic factor is how a person from a certain tribe can change their social status. Economic factors often make this gap conspicuous. The rich and poor tend to create separate social groups.

The existence of differences in social life resulted in differences in treatment. In fact, people often group together based on certain criteria. For example, a community group will group based on the same religion. Meanwhile, other people of different religions will be considered outside of the community. It also happens to ethnicity and race whereby these racial differences also distinguish the treatment one race against different races. For example, in America, white and black people are distinguished based on special treatment for white citizens. Therefore, white people are considered superior to black people. This is also the case in Indonesia, where black people, especially those from Papua, are considered less civilized than people with brown skin (i.e., whiter).

However, differences in race, ethnicity and religion fade or disappear when a person has economic success. One's position is lifted, and all differences ignored when one can improve the economy. Thus, in principle, economic improvement can change or improve social positions. As Karl Marx believed, the history of social dynamics is a dialectic between economic development on the one hand and social class structures on the other. This is why the determinants of social change are economic and not socio-political or ideological (Suseno, 2001).

As stated by Karl Marx, economic domination is the most sensitive issue in socio-political life. Humans have a natural will to fight each other to get the most if the issue of ownership is not regulated by the state. Private property rights make people selfish and destroy the natural harmony of the society. Therefore, one ideal of Marxism is the abolition of private property rights. With time the abolition of ownership is not possible and thus the issue of balancing salary arrangements must be regulated by the government. Therefore, primarily, the improvement of wages for social and political balance is necessary

"...the relationship of wage-based exploitation will spread to more and more social activities, deepening as a result of the subsequent real subordination, and ultimately leading to the elimination of enormous disparities in skills income and lifestyle for people" (See in Neilson, 2007).

II. METHODOLOGY

This research applies descriptive qualitative research which is using the data in the form of words expression in the novel as the object material. Besides that, this research also raises the social issues based on the genetic structuralism which is regarded as the formal object or the theory of the research. The data are arranged scientifically so that make it easy to be presented in this paper.

This research is applied the genetic structuralism as the framework to analyze the data. In the researcher's perception, what is expressed by the author of the novel which is very relevant with the social background when the novel was created. As also stated previously, that the Morrison confesses that she created literary works as one of the way to struggle to sound the humanistic values. As what is experienced by the author that black people were discriminated

Wajiran & Septiani, N. A.
The subordination of black people in the United States Toni Morrison's novel, beloved

by the white people. Morrison's view was strongly influenced by his own life experience, where at that time white American society was still very discriminatory against black people.

Genetic Structuralism is one of the most suitable theories that deal with the history of the creation of literary works. This theory also possible to explore the issues dealing with the reason why the author's background of creating such literary works. Because of that, the researcher also read comprehensively the history of the society, socio-political issues of the social background that inspire the author to produce the literary works. Other social theory that deals with the themes presented in the novel also important to comprehend the understanding of the rich meaning of the literary works.

In genetic structuralism the researcher can understand the background of the author, but also the background of the socio-political of the society. The social background is the foundation or inspiration of the author to explore the theme of the literature. The thought that are triggered on the era of the author also influenced to the author. Therefore, this is very important to consider the author's background of the author: society, religion, as well as political affiliation of the author.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The genre of Black American literature is very dynamic as it changes with societal experiences. As a country considered to be the most democratic, social issues related to injustice, oppression, discrimination, and bureaucratic crimes in the United States have become commonplace, as reflected in literary works. The democratization that occurred in America allowed a writer to write freely, even when dealing with topics related to the ruler or government. Therefore, many writers also became politicians, such as John Grisham, John Ehrlichman, and Siro Agnew. These writers have made many controversial statements regarding events in the American society (Doctorow, 1976; Morant, 1998).

Morrison's *Beloved* is a literary work that reveals the history of white supremacy (Krumholz, 1992), that is, white supremacists who felt superior to black people. This superiority resulted in discrimination against black people as they were considered to be part of a lower-class society. The novel *Beloved* represents a deplorable condition for black slaves, especially women. Therefore, heavy suffering as a slave frustrates the main character of this novel. Judging from how Morrison describes the problems in this novel, the author animates every incident in this novel. Setyoningsih et al. (2014) stated that this novel depicts the life history of the author herself who was very frustrated with the discrimination experienced by black people in the United States, especially in Ohio (Setyoningsih, 2014). This frustrating condition is shown directly by the act of killing her own biological child, so that the born child does not become a slave like the parents.

Toni Morrison, as well as other African writers such as Alice Walker, wrote literary works that were always political, to liberate human beings from racial discrimination and gender oppression (Rigney, 1991). These are the political efforts of African Americans as part of their commitment to achieving a better future. Therefore, what Morrison voiced in this novel can be considered a social protest (Davis, 1998). This is natural because black people have been in disadvantaged positions because of stigmatization. They have been considered

Wajiran & Septiani, N. A.

The subordination of black people in the United States Toni Morrison's novel, beloved

second people, which makes them unworthy of being treated as human beings. In reality, black people are considered slaves and this treatment is contrary to human values. Moreover, they often receive inhumane treatment from their employers (Zamalin, 2014).

A strong indication that the topics in Morrison's novel are a reality can be seen in the way the author describes the setting of the story; in an interview between Toni Morrison and Stepto, she alluded to the idea that where she lived influenced the setting. It was emphasized that every place Morrison lived in had its own nuances. In this residence, the author had valuable experiences. This life experience provided its own richness, which is expressed in her novels. Unfortunately, living in America was not a good experience for her and she related the experiences of atrocities committed by white people against black slaves. Thus, Morrison said that even though all the places she was told were in America, it did not mean that she could feel American (Morrison & Stepto, 1977). Schur (2004) emphasizes that Morrison's work is a struggle for individual human rights in obtaining life worthiness (Schur, 2004). Her novels are a satire for white people who still think of black people as not fully human.

Understanding Morrison's novel involves not only studying the history of slavery, but also understanding the psychological condition of the victims of slavery. Morrison's work is a traumatic description of discrimination against and slavery of black people (Bouacida, 2021). The cruelty of the white man towards the black man slave left a wound that was difficult to mend. Slavery not only left pain because of harsh treatments by white citizens but also left trauma due to the discrimination and stigmatization that occurred in American society itself. Bouacida (2021) further states that Morrison very often described gloomy times that still haunt black people.

The struggle of the social class

Beloved can be called an autobiographical novel. It describes a setting of the place where Morrison once actually lived. As an autobiographical novel, the *Beloved* is often considered a historical novel, depicting the history of slavery experienced by black people. Some observers refer to this novel as an expression of a bitter life experience, expressing the author's dislike of the slavery experienced by black people in America (Rody, 1995). This novel is set during the First World War, between 1861 and 1865, and is about the escape of Margaret Garner. From this story, the writer elaborates on the issue of slavery in the United States. The setting of this novel is mostly Ohio, where Morrison lives. Garner is a slave who fled from the city of Kentucky to Ohio in search of freedom. Under United States law at the time, a master could take the offspring of a slave, even if the slave had fled to a different state. For this reason, Garner killed her son rather than hand the child over to her former master (Rushdy, 2012).

The author raises the case carried out by Garner is a strategy to make people aware of how cruel white people are to black people. This incident is used as a trigger for the story in this novel. In this context, slavery made black people very frustrated with their future. The author considers that the murder of this biological child is an extraordinary crime that cannot be accepted by human reason.

Wajiran & Septiani, N. A.

The subordination of black people in the United States Toni Morrison's novel, beloved

Through this novel, the author recounts past experiences through the main character, Shethe who has bitter life experiences, as a slave. Life is difficult because it is filled with inhumane treatment verbal and physical violence such as being beaten and kicked, and having 'inhumane' hours of work. Shethe's position represented those who were slaves. Whereby almost all slaves get inhumane treatment.

In this novel, Morrison also emphasizes that injustice is also legitimized by the state. The cruelty conducted by a master against a slave, never received the attention of the government. The acts of violence committed by the employer never receive any legal sanctions even though they violate the philosophy of the American nation itself.

Black people were considered non-human and were separated from whites. This separation was clearly the discriminatory attitude of white citizens. Black citizens do not have civil rights. Their existence was concerning. They live on the poverty line because they could not access jobs like white people. As a result, black citizens could only access menial jobs that very low wages.

This inhumane treatment was carried out because it was assumed that white people had a higher position than black people. Consequently, arbitrary treatment often occurred. Unskilled workers or slaves were often treated inhumanely (Setyoningsih, 2014). As with other novels, *Beloved* also describes the place setting in detail. This story is set in 124 Bluestone Road and describes the slavery experienced by black people in agricultural areas. The difficulty of black life is represented by Shethe who tells Paul D:

I can't live no more. I can't no more." "Can't what? What can't you?" "I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Boys don't either. (Morrison, 1987: 17)

In the conversation, Shethe was not only discriminated against because she was a black citizen, but also because she was a woman. This also represents the position of the author, as black as well as a woman. As a woman, Shethe was considered a weak creature and did not have high economic productivity compared with male workers. Because women were physically weak, they were often exploited for their strength to benefit white people. Ironically, Shethe was not only used for housework but also for fulfilling sexual needs. All work was done by black people as slaves without adequate compensation. On the other hand, they were treated harshly and women were often harassed.

Issues of discrimination and sexual violence also exist in Toni Morrison's other novels. The novel *Mercy* discusses the issue of slavery and sexual violence perpetrated by white people against black women. Sexual violence was experienced by both single and married women (Nadhifah, 2012). Sexual violence perpetrated by white people was not only an expression of lust but also a hope for the slaves to have many children for the sake of cheap labor. That is why white people preferred it if the slaves had many children:

Slaves not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that. But they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them. Still, they were not supposed to have pleasure deep down... (Morrison, 1987: 209)

The above expression indicates that slaves were not independent humans. They were forced to be servants of others, even before they were born. Blacks could not have fun. In this

Wajiran & Septiani, N. A.

The subordination of black people in the United States Toni Morrison's novel, beloved

context, it can be interpreted that the busier black people were with menial jobs and taking care of children, the less opportunities they had to develop and enjoy life. There was a fear among white people that if slaves enjoyed the pleasures of life and developed themselves, they would take a stand against their masters. At the very least, the opportunity for growth for blacks would be a threat to the establishment of whites as the status quo. Hence, Fatmasari (2016) interprets the above quotation as slaves being considered only as property.

Morrison raised the female characters in this novel with reason. First, as a female writer, she had a much more sensitivity to the issues concerning women in American society at the time. Second, at the time, a far greater percentage of women were slaves. Women were employed as slaves not only in the home but also in the farm and for sexual exploitation. Low-lying women are more easily controlled by their employers. Their existence could also be said to be more profitable because black women were known to be physically stronger than white women (Fatmasari, 2016).

Shethe's expression above shows how miserable black people were, especially female slaves. They were blackmailed for the employer's benefits. The existence of the social life of a slave or black citizen was not recognized. They were considered socially inferior. As a result, they were often treated harshly. The conditions were quite severe, harsh, and inhumane, making Shethe desperate and frustrated. This often caused black people to choose to be shot dead. However, this choice was also not given because white people often beat and treated them harshly and did not want to kill them because their labor was needed. This is described in the following expression:

"Hungry, nigger?" "Yes, sir." "Here you go." Occasionally a kneeling man chose gunshot in his head as the price, maybe, of taking a bit of foreskin with him to Jesus. (Morrison, 1987: 218)

Abusive treatment and sexual violence occurred because white citizens perceived black people to be inferior beings. This superiority resulted in giving white people the courage arbitrarily acts as black people. Superiority occurs because a higher social position is caused by several factors such as social status, economy, power, or the majority (Swencionis et al., 2017). In the case of the slavery and inhumane treatment of blacks, the superiority of whites dominated the whole. The United States was ruled by a white majority who had political, population domination, and economic domination and citizen superiority. This condition made socio-political and economic policies more favorable for the white people.

Toni Morrison chose to describe Shethe choosing to kill her children as a contradiction to ensure that slavery was a heinous act that violated human rights. If acts of violence committed by whites against black women were interpreted as heinous, they could not be justified. This is tantamount to committing the murder of one's own children. This kind of protest was also carried out because of the tremendous psychological pressure experienced by the main character. Black people are humans who have thoughts and feelings like white citizens; however, they were treated like pets.

The strategic depiction of Shethe killing her own son was a bold move. Even though it was based on a real incident by Garner, in the context of America's democratization, it is something that cannot be accepted. This is because the American government promotes policies on human rights. In addition, the principle of the state of America is equality, but

Wajiran & Septiani, N. A.

The subordination of black people in the United States Toni Morrison's novel, beloved

daily life far from depicts a reality of justice and equality. This certainly opens awareness opportunities for black people, especially those from Africa, to demand the same rights as white citizens. As fellow human beings, black citizens must be treated in the same way as white citizens. They must also be awarded the same value and dignity as white citizens.

From the perspective of literary tendencies (engaged literature), Jean Paul Sartre revealed that a writer must have certain ideals in creating literary works. Thus, Toni Morrison conveys her ideal of freeing black people from slavery. Even if it is impossible to escape slavery, the author wanted white people to not treat women, especially black women as slaves, as they have done thus far. Acts of cruelty and sexual violence against women are inhumane acts that must be eliminated in the United States. Toni Morrison highlighted a class struggle in this context and showed that the black class wants rights as autonomous and independent human beings.

In addition, Toni Morrison described how cruelly white people treated slaves and black citizens. She also described a dream that should be carried out by an employer. If there were only an awareness of human values and the values of equality, which became the philosophy of the American state implemented in life, the slaves would not experience inhumane treatment at the time. Morrison wanted, a master to treat their slaves humanely, as described in this statement.

Loaves and fishes were his powers- they did not belong to an ex-slave who had probably never carried one hundred pounds to the scale or picked okra with a baby on her back. Who had never been lashed by a ten-year-old white boy as God knows they had. (Morrison, 1987:269)

This depiction may also reflect that not all employers treated black people harshly. However, the values of white supremacy are ingrained in American society, and harsh treatment of black people has become a 'natural' phenomenon. This can be seen in the legal process that has conventionally been unfair to black citizens. For instance, the case of George Floyd, a black citizen killed by a police officer named Derek Chauvin. This incident sparked large demonstrations by both blacks and whites demanding the equal treatment of Americans (Cons of Act (H.R. 7120), 2020).

Furthermore, Morrison described the existence of a master who is good to their slaves. One of the masters described as having good ethics towards slaves was Bodwin. She treated Shethe well, even giving her a job and teaching Denver, Shethe's son, a few things. Bodwin family also provided free housing to Shethe's family (Zamalin, 2014). This picture indicates that white citizens could give good treatment. However, not all white people felt obligated to treat black people fairly.

Although not all employers (white citizens) were rude to their black slaves, the slavery system treated them unfairly. This could be understood from the meager wages that the slaves earned. That is why Zamalin (2004) states that the novel also discusses income for black people at work. Generally, slaves did not receive appropriate salary, which meant that they had to work without reasonable time allotment, yet without reasonable salary. This caused slaves in difficult situation, as they must work hard to fulfill their responsibility and do not have additional income. If they had freedom, they would work outside hours to earn extra money. As quoted by Zamalin (2014):

Wajiran & Septiani, N. A.

The subordination of black people in the United States Toni Morrison's novel, beloved

She had heard about an afternoon job at the shirt factory. She hoped that with her nights work at the Bodwin's and another one, she could put away something and help her mother too.

The depiction above actually shows how difficult the position is for a slave. His/her time was running out to work for his/her employer, while due to insufficient income, she had to look for additional work at night. Working at night means reducing her rest time. This condition makes black people in America marginalized. They do not have the opportunity to develop themselves to get a better future.

Violence and worry were common for black slaves in America. They did not have adequate living facilities, let alone a guarantee for a decent life for their descendants. They did not even get time for complete rest. They worked hard to fill their employer's orders. If they did not do so, they would be scolded, yelled at, and arbitrarily beaten by their employers. When they were subjected to harsh treatment with insults, they could not easily leave their master's house because they were already tied to their status which was bought by the master. As slaves, they resembled pets. Slaves could be treated at will by their masters; they could even be traded or discarded when their productivity declined or they did not meet the standards desired by the masters.

Inhumane conditions such as this, often made slaves choose to run away at all costs. Running away was not only received with punishment from the employer in the form of a blasphemy of harsh words and beatings but also severe punishment for the violation. However, running away is not a guarantee for improving their lives. Being free did not mean better prospects for black people. This is because they did not have a clear goal and could become a bone of contention for white people to become slaves. That is why many parents of slaves faced the dilemma of a life of slavery for their children. This situation was caused by the social status of black people in the country as they were not equal to white people. Discrimination based on race ethnicity, religion, and skin color was still very large at the time.

Would he pick women for them or what did he think was going to happen when those boys ran smack into their nature? Some danger he was courting and he surely knew it. In fact, his order for them not to leave Sweet Home except in his company, was not so much because of the law, but the danger of men-bred slaves on the loose. (Morrison, 1987: 274)

Black people who were considered not to meet the criteria of slaves became homeless or lived in poverty. As a result, their lives were filled with harsh conditions. Socially and economically, they were in difficult positions, which often triggered them to commit crimes. This is why street life, thieves, and drug dealers are often black citizens. This condition created a negative stigma around black people. This negative stigma makes black people unable to get decent paying jobs or the opportunity for jobs with equal rewards to white people. One of the things they can do is run their own business, and even then, it becomes a challenge because discrimination by white people makes it difficult for them to develop their businesses. Doing a business also requires considerable investment, which is impossible for many black people.

Negative stigma toward black people furthers the injustice faced by them. Violence against black people is often not considered hot news among the public. Incidents of violence experienced by black citizens have never received any attention from the media. This is

Wajiran & Septiani, N. A.

The subordination of black people in the United States Toni Morrison's novel, beloved

because the media are generally owned and controlled by white citizens. In addition, American society already believes that black people are to blame.

Nor was it there because the person had been killed, or maimed or caught or burned or jailed or whipped or evicted or stomped or raped or cheated, since that could hardly qualify as news in a newspaper. (Morrison, 1987:306)

What is described in the novel *Beloved* is inseparable from the problem of the identity struggle. This struggle concerns universal human values. However, Morrison offers a wider opportunity to raise the issue of injustice related to white supremacy. In this context, what is described in this novel alludes to the issue of discrimination by one social class against another due to inferiority resulting from the differences in skin color, economic level, gender, and level of knowledge (education). Each of these factors greatly influenced the way white Americans treated black people. Thus, the concept of 'the survival of the fittest', is real in human life in this context.

In the context of a marginalized society, the novel *Beloved* can also be interpreted as the author's attempt to raise issues of discrimination against black people in American society. Morrison tries to convey that the marginal position of blacks, in term of economic, political and gender backwardness, allows for more severe discrimination than if they were only marginalized by race. In this context, Shethe is a female character, indicating that social status and gender influence the discriminatory treatment of black people. That is why Rigney (2019) states that Morrison raised the issue of humanity from both racial discrimination and gender context (Rigney, 1991).

IV. CONCLUSION

From the above description, it can be concluded that *Beloved* is a real description of the history of the struggle of black people as slaves in the United States. The cruel treatment performed by the master to the slave is the representation of the subordination of black people in the United States. America's dark history of slavery is part of the struggle for oppressed people and other groups that have suffered the same fate. Therefore, what is described in this novel is a political movement to find a better composition for minority citizens in the United States.

The struggle of the marginal class will never end. Until now there has been discrimination and unfair treatment of minority citizens. This is caused by class consciousness, and the superiority of certain groups threatens them. The superiority of a community can be attributed to victory in numbers. In America white people are the majority, which is why the term white supremacy is an issue that will never end. In fact, white supremacy will not be a problem if white people can implement the values of American philosophy and equality for all citizens.

Wajiran & Septiani, N. A.
The subordination of black people in the United States Toni Morrison's novel, beloved

REFERENCES

- [1] Bouacida, S. (2021). Childhood is “not a story to pass on”: Trauma and memory paradox in Toni Morrison’s *God Help the Child*. *Jordan Journal of Modern Languages and Literatures*, 13(3), p. 399–410. Retrieved from www.languageinindia.com
- [2] Cons of Act (H.R. 7120). (2020). Cons of Act (H.R. 7120): Should congress pass the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act to reform U.S. *Policing Practices and Increase Accountability?* *Congressional Digest*, 99(7), p. 19–29. <https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/7120>
- [3] Davis, K. C. (1998). “Postmodern Blackness”: Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and the end of history. *Twentieth Century Literature*, 44(2), p. 242. <https://doi.org/10.2307/441873>
- [4] Doctorow, E. L. (1976). Writers and politicians. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1976/04/11/archives/writers-and-politicians.html>
- [5] Fatmasari, Y. (2016). Womb control in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. *Jurnal Poetika*, 4(1), p. 31–48. <https://doi.org/10.22146/poetika.v4i1.13312>
- [6] Herminingrum, S. (2010). Four criteria for labeling black women and their community as “others” in Toni Morrison’s novels. *Jurnal Humaniora*, 22(3), 231–240. Retrieved from <http://jurnal.ugm.ac.id/index.php/jurnal-humaniora/article/view/998>
- [7] Hevesi, D. (1988). Toni Morrison’s novel “*beloved*” wins the pulitzer prize in fiction. *New York Times*. Retrieved from April 1, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/04/01/nyregion/toni-morrison-s-novel-beloved-wins-the-pulitzer-prize-in-fiction.html>
- [8] Ingle, S. (2007). Lies, damned lies and literature: George Orwell and “the truth.” *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 9(4), 730–746. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-856X.2007.00298.x>
- [9] Krumholz, L. (1992). The ghosts of slavery: Historical recovery in Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*. *African American Review*, 26(3), 395. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3041912>
- [10] Melus, S., & Tettenborn, E. (2006). *Melancholia as Resistance in Contemporary African American Literature* Author (s): Éva Tettenborn Published by : Oxford University Press on behalf of Society for the Study of the Multi- Ethnic Literature of the United States (MELUS) Stable URL : <https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/31.3.101>
- [11] Morant, B. (1998). Law, literature, and contract: An essay in realism. *Michigan Journal of Race and Law*, 4(1), p. 1. <https://core.ac.uk/download/232704888.pdf>
- [12] Morrison, T., & Stepto, R. (1977). “Intimate things in place”: A conversation with Toni Morrison. *The Massachusetts Review*, 18(3), 473–489. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25088764>

Wajiran & Septiani, N. A.
The subordination of black people in the United States Toni Morrison's novel, beloved

- [13] Nadhifah, N. L. (2012). Beban ganda yang dialami perempuan kulit hitam dalam dua novel Toni Morrison, *A Mercy* dan *Home*. *Lensa*, Vol. 7(1), p. 35–51. <https://jurnal.unimus.ac.id/index.php/lensa/article/view/2265>
- [14] Neilson, D. (2007). Formal and real subordination and re-coupling marxist class theory and labour-process analysis. *Capital & Class*, Vol. 31(1), p. 89–124. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/030981680709100105>
- [15] Parker, E. (2001). A new hystery: History and hysteria in Toni Morrison's "Beloved." *Twentieth Century Literature*, 47(1), p. 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1215/0041462X-2001-2006>
- [16] Rigney, B. H. (1991). *The Voices of Toni Morrison* (Charlotte Dihoff, ed.). United States: Ohio States University.
- [17] Rody, C. (1995). Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: History, "rememory," and a "clamor for a kiss." *American Literary History*, 7(1), p. 92–119. <https://doi.org/10.1093/alh/7.1.92>
- [18] Rushdy, A. H. A. (2012). Daughters Signifyin (g) history : The Example of Toni Morrison ' s *Beloved* Ashraf Rushdy Signifyin (g) History : Daughters *Beloved* of Toni Morrison's The Example. *Daughters*, 64(3), p. 567–597. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2927752>
- [19] Schur, R. L. (2004). Locating "paradise" in the post-civil rights era: Toni Morrison and critical race theory. *Contemporary Literature*, 45(2), p. 276–299. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3593567>
- [20] Setyoningsih, D. L. (2014). *Death drive: A negative impact of racial abuse in Toni Morrison's Beloved*. <https://repository.unej.ac.id/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/68040/Dhini%20Lela%20Setyoningsih.pdf?sequence=1>
- [21] Suseno, F. M. (2001). *Pemikiran Karl Marx: Dari sosialisme utopis ke perselisihan revisionisme*. Jakarta: Gramedia.
- [22] Swencionis, J. K., Dupree, C. H., & Fiske, S. T. (2017). Warmth-competence tradeoffs in impression management across race and social-class divides. *Journal of Social Issues*, 73(1), p.175–191. <https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12210>
- [23] Zamalin, A. (2014). *Beloved* citizens: Toni Morrison's "Beloved", racial inequality, and American public policy. *Women's Studies Quarterly*, 42(1), p. 205–211. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24364924>