

BEYOND RACE AND GENDER: A STUDY OF STRUCTURAL INTERSECTIONALITY IN TONI MORRISON'S *SONG OF SOLOMON*

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Abstract

The terror and suppression experienced by Black women during slavery and its aftermath are well-documented historical facts. The objective of this study is to identify and analyze the diverse forms of oppression experienced by black women and their impacts in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. The present study addresses a gap in the literature where prior studies have overlooked a comprehensive exploration of intersecting identities beyond the confines of trauma, race, and gender. The present study uniquely delves into aspects of intersectionality, including sexuality, ability, disability, and class. The study employs Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory and a qualitative method of textual analysis through close reading to identify racism, violence, abandonment, sexism, and gender subordination as primary forms of repression. The findings reveal that Black women in the novel face multifaceted subjugation, largely stemming from structural intersectionality, perpetrated by both White people and Black men. These experiences can lead to severe consequences, including depression, despair, trauma, and social marginalization. The present study's scope is confined to a selected group of characters and textual analysis; consequently, its findings are context-specific. This study contributes to a broader understanding of the intersection of race, gender, and class in literary representations.

Keywords: abandonment, gender, racism, sexism, violence

Introduction

Toni Morrison is one of the most renowned and influential African American writers in the world of literature. Her accomplishments have earned her numerous prestigious awards, including the National Book Award in 1975, the Pulitzer Prize in 1988, the National Book Foundation Medal in 1995, and the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993 (Gillespie, 2008; Roynon, 2013). Born on February 18, 1931, in Lorain, Ohio, under the name Chloe Ardelia Wofford, she is well-known under the pseudonym Toni Morrison. *Song of Solomon*, her third novel, was published in



1977 and received the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1978. It was also her first novel to gain both commercial and critical recognition (Gillespie, 2008). Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* is a multifaceted work that delves into a plethora of complex themes and social issues, with a particular focus on African American identity, history, and community. The text addresses a wide array of subjects, including identity and self-discovery, the lingering effects of slavery and racism, and gender subjugation and the abandonment of women. This study is conducted to fill the gap of several previous studies that only focused on the issue of trauma, race, gender, and the legacy of slavery.

The primary objectives of this study are to identify the forms of oppression endured by Black women and their impact on Black women's lives, as depicted in the novel *Song of Solomon*. The text's analysis is grounded in the theoretical framework of intersectionality, a concept initially developed by Kimberle Crenshaw. The following studies provide the foundation for this research. For instance, Mozdastan et al. (2014) address the issue of trauma and its intergenerational transmission, particularly in the context of African American history and the legacy of slavery. The study examines how characters in the novel, particularly Milkman, grapple with the legacy of slavery and attempt to reclaim their identity. The article does not offer a comprehensive perspective on the oppression experienced by Black women and its subsequent impacts, but rather, it provides an analysis of the concept of trauma fiction in the context of African American history and the broader legacy of slavery. Hathaway (2019) then explores race, gender, and religion. This study highlights how Toni Morrison employs biblical imagery, language, and narrative to challenge and subvert traditional patriarchal structures. A notable critique of the article is its thematic selectivity and analytical boundaries, which limit its comprehensive exploration of oppression. The text does not offer a comprehensive representation of the Black female experience, nor does it methodically document the full scope of oppressive influences. Instead, it employs key characters and narrative strategies to reveal how oppression operates and how it can be reimagined within Morrison's literary and theological framework. Next, Hammoudi and Rasheed (2021) examine the complex interrelationship between historical reality and the fictional elements in Morrison's work, emphasizing the importance of the past as seen through the lens of postmodernism. The article does not address or analyze the systemic oppression experienced by Black women or its subsequent repercussions within the context of the novel. The scope of the text is postmodern and historiographic, with a focus on how Morrison reconstructs history and identity rather than providing a comprehensive feminist analysis of Black women's oppression.

Dias (2023) analyzes the power and significance of names through the characters' identities, histories, and familial relationships. This study highlights the significance of memory, storytelling, and the preservation of one's heritage through the tradition of naming and demonstrates how these elements contribute to self-discovery and a sense of belonging. However, the article does not provide a comprehensive exploration of the oppression experienced by Black women in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. Instead, the focus is on specific characters and their names, particularly the character of Hagar, who is used to illustrate themes of oppression and abandonment that resonate with the experiences of some Black women. By examining the biblical reference to Hagar and its parallels in the novel,

the article illuminates a particular aspect of the oppression experienced by Black women within the narrative. In summary, the article focuses on the symbolic power of names and heritage rather than providing a comprehensive evaluation of the oppression of Black women in general in the novel. Then, Allawi (2023) and Kumar (2023) explore their study into Milkman and Pilate's journey toward self-realization, independence, and knowledge of their heritage. Its primary focus is the philosophical perspective of existentialism, which emphasizes individual liberty, responsibility, and the pursuit of meaning in life. The articles fail to address the systemic oppression experienced by Black women, and they do not provide a comprehensive or collective analysis of its impacts. The scope of these texts is philosophical and character-centered, with an emphasis on existential themes rather than feminist critique or systemic oppression.

Subsequently, Rajeswari and Jothimani (2019), investigate the complexities of Black identity in White America, particularly through the lens of violence and its impact on the characters' sense of self and identity. By analyzing the psychological and social effects of violence on the characters, the study seeks to elucidate the complexities of Black identity formation and the quest for self-realization within a hostile environment. The article addresses the issue of Black women's oppression, but it does so in a selective and illustrative manner. The present analysis demonstrates a clear oversight: it fails to cover all Black women represented in the novel. Moreover, it does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the full spectrum of impacts. Instead, it relies on the use of representative characters and thematic interpretation, thereby making its scope analytically focused but not exhaustive. Meanwhile, Zheng (2023) addresses the issue of feminism, which focuses on the dual oppression of Black women: racial and gender discrimination under White dominant culture and patriarchal society. The study implied that White culture and patriarchal society are the sources of oppression and underscored the significance of Black women's independence and strength. The article addresses the oppression of Black women, but in a limited, character-based, and thematic manner. The text fails to encompass the totality of Black women depicted in the novel, and it does not methodically examine the comprehensive array of consequences resulting from the system of oppression. Instead, the text employs a select group of characters to illustrate feminist concerns, thereby rendering its scope analytical but not exhaustive.

A review of the extant literature reveals an absence of studies that address Black women's intersecting identities, including sexuality, ability, disability, and class, as the foundation of their subjugation. Therefore, this study delves into the aspects that are missed in previous studies, particularly the issue of intersectionality and repressions experienced by Black women. The scope of this study will be focused on Black women's intersectionality and oppression and their impacts on Black women. This study seeks to understand Black women's intersectionality and oppression by formulating the following research questions: What forms of oppression are experienced by Black women? What are the impacts of that oppression on Black women? The significance of this study lies in its contribution to an expanded understanding of how race, gender, and class intersect to shape Black women's experiences in literature. Moreover, it contributes to the critical discourse surrounding Toni Morrison's literary works, particularly concerning the

intricate portrayal of Black womanhood and domestic settings within the context of African American literature.

The present study is limited to a textual analysis of selected Black female characters in *Song of Solomon*. The framework of intersectionality, as developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw, is applied in this study, with a focus on the intersections of race, gender, and class. Moreover, this study is exclusively based on close reading and interpretive analysis, lacking empirical validation or reader-response data. Consequently, the findings are context-specific, implying that they cannot be generalized beyond the selected text or to all representations of Black women in literature.

In analyzing the object of the study, the writer uses Crenshaw's intersectionality theory. This concept within feminist theory has gained significant traction among Black feminist activists. Crenshaw (1991) asserts that in the case of violence against women, the abuse that many women suffer is frequently influenced by other aspects of their identity, including race and class. Crenshaw (1991) conceptualizes intersectionality as the various ways in which race and gender interact to shape the multifaceted dimensions of Black experiences. Delgado and Stefancic (2017); Lykke (2010) propose that the multifaceted dimensions of Black identity extend beyond the conventional categories of race and class. Rather, they encompass a multitude of intersecting identities, including gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age/generation, ability, disability, nationality, mother tongue, and many other aspects that collectively shape the complex web of societal disparities and unfair social relations.

According to Crenshaw (1991) Intersectionality can be categorized into three distinct types: structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality. The concept of structural intersectionality offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the compounding effects of poverty and limited skill sets among Black women, arising from the interplay of gender and class oppression. This theoretical framework elucidates how systemic barriers, including structural racism and gendered poverty, disproportionately impact Black women, constraining their access to education, employment, and essential resources (Williams-Buttler, 2022; Nhlapho & Zondi, 2025). For instance, Black women frequently experience elevated representation in low-wage, precarious employment sectors, concurrently assuming the onerous responsibility of unpaid care work. This dual burden serves to perpetuate economic vulnerability among this demographic (Nhlapho & Zondi, 2025). Furthermore, educational disparities are intensified by the convergence of intersecting oppressions, wherein the dynamics of race and gender shape the experiences of Black girls in educational contexts, consequently perpetuating socio-economic disadvantages (Evans-Winters, 2021). An analysis of social rights access in Brazil reveals the presence of analogous structural barriers, underscoring the pressing need for targeted interventions to promote equity and dismantle these oppressive systems (Cruz et al., 2024). Consequently, addressing the unique challenges faced by Black women necessitates a thorough understanding of structural intersectionality and its ramifications for policy and practice.

The concept of political intersectionality is a critical lens through which to examine the manner in which social justice movements and political policies often marginalize the specific needs of Black women, who, due to their race and gender, navigate multiple layers of oppression. This concept, grounded in Black feminist

theory, underscores that systemic structures of privilege and discrimination give rise to distinctive political needs for these individuals, which mainstream feminist movements often fail to acknowledge (Brown et al., 2024; Crowder & Smith, 2020). Examples from history demonstrate the pervasiveness of this issue, including the exclusion of Black women from early feminist movements (Crowder & Smith, 2020). Moreover, contemporary research underscores the imperative for policies that address the compounded challenges confronting Black women, particularly in domains such as housing and health, which are exacerbated by their intersectional identities (Paseda & Ogbe, 2025). Consequently, adopting a transformative approach that prioritizes the experiences of intersectionally marginalized groups is imperative for achieving authentic social justice (Christoffersen & Siow, 2025).

Representational intersectionality focuses on how cultural representations often fail to adequately portray the complex experiences of Black women who belong to several marginalized groups (Crenshaw, 1991). It emerges from cultural narratives and imagery that construct Black women through intersecting racial and gendered stereotypes. This form of intersectionality manifests in controversies and debates surrounding the representation of Black women in popular culture and the media. These representations may encompass racialized gender stereotypes that obscure multifaceted experiences and engender public misinterpretations. Consequently, the representational marginalization of Black women engenders further disempowerment, as cultural images shape societal perceptions, policy responses, and even the self-understanding of these women (Crenshaw, 1991). In summary, the fundamental principle of Crenshaw's intersectionality is that Black women's suffering, such as sexual abuse, physical and verbal violence, domestic violence, marginalization, segregation, poverty, ignorance, and other forms of oppression, is triggered by numerous aspects related to Black women either directly or indirectly. Crenshaw's work highlights the necessity of an intersectional framework for comprehending and addressing the multifaceted nature of bias experienced by Black women.

Method

This study uses a qualitative method. The data is collected from Morrison's novel *Song of Solomon*. Then, the data is analyzed using Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectionality theory, incorporating textual analysis and close reading. In close reading, a text is examined in depth, focusing on particular elements to discern its underlying meanings (Muhlisin et al., 2021). Furthermore, it emphasizes not only the literal or surface meaning of a text but also the metaphorical or underlying implications, making it a valuable method for analyzing diverse literary forms (Kinga, 2014).

In collecting the data, the researcher undertakes several steps introduced by Kurnia et al. (2024). The stages are as follows: First, the researcher employs a close reading of the novel *Song of Solomon* to comprehend the issue presented in the text. The researcher then conceptualizes the research questions and proceeds to collect the data by highlighting and writing relevant information in the form of excerpts to answer the research questions. Subsequent to this initial step, the data is subjected to categorization and is integrated into the designated data set. Subsequently, the data goes through a validation process to ensure its congruence with the context. The subsequent phase entails the interpretation of the collected data. The

subsequent analysis of the data employs Crenshaw's intersectionality theory as a methodological framework. The presented findings are supported by a range of primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources encompass a wide array of critical essays, journals, articles, and reviews. The research culminates in a concluding assertion regarding Morrison's exploration of the oppressive experiences and their impacts on Black women.

Findings and discussion

The study's findings on the forms of oppression experienced by Black women are presented in the following table. Table 1 presents the forms of oppression and their intersectionality category.

Table 1: The forms of oppression based on the theory of intersectionality

No	Perpetrators	Victims	Forms of oppression (battering, spouse violence, rape, domestic violence, racism, sexism, race subordination, gender subordination)	Intersecting Identity Category (gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age/generation, ability, disability, nationality, mother tongue, and other)	Intersectionality Category (structural, political, representational)
1	White people	All Black women	No Black women and men were accepted into Mercy Hospital. The hospital served White people only before the incident of Mr. Smith jumping off from the hospital's roof. [racism]	Race/ ethnicity	Structural
2	A White man	Reba	Reba won a contest and became the first winner, but they did not put her picture on the paper because she was a Black woman. However, they put the picture of the man who became the runner-up, but he is a White. [racism]	Race/ethnicity	Structural
3	White people	Hagar	Hagar upgrades her appearance to get light White skin. [racism]	Race	Structural
4	White people	Corinthian	Though Corinthians has attended a university, she has just become a housemaid in Miss Graham's house. [racism]	Race/ ethnicity	Structural

No	Perpetrators	Victims	Forms of oppression (battering, spouse violence, rape, domestic violence, racism, sexism, race subordination, gender subordination)	Intersecting Identity Category(gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age/generation, ability, disability, nationality, mother tongue, and other)	Intersectionality Category (structural, political, representational)
5	Macon Dead II	Ruth	He says to his wife, Ruth, that she is a silly, foolish woman. [verbal violence]	Gender	Structural
6	Macon Dead II	Ruth	In a family dinner, Macon Dead beats his wife. [domestic violence/ battering]	Gender	Structural
7	Macon Dead II	Mrs. Bains	Macon Dead II forces Mrs. Bains to pay off her debt for renting the house; otherwise, she will be expelled from the house. [threat/verbal violence]	Disability	structural
8	A Black Preacher	Pilate	The preacher pets and molests Pilate when she is young. [sexual violence]	Sexuality	Structural
9	Solomon	Ryna	Solomon flies to Africa due to the hardship of slavery, but fails to bring his wife, Ryna, and 20 children. [abandonment]	Gender and disability.	Structural
10	Macon Dead II	Ruth	Macon shows no affection and never sleeps with Ruth again. [abandonment]	Gender	structural
11	Black people	Pilate	“Pilate had become extremely depressed and lonely after the birth. The baby’s father was forbidden to see her since she had not “healed” yet, and she spent some dark, lonely hours, along with the joyous ones, with the baby. [abandonment]	Gender	Structural

No	Perpetrators	Victims	Forms of oppression (battering, spouse violence, rape, domestic violence, racism, sexism, race subordination, gender subordination)	Intersecting Identity Category (gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age/generation, ability, disability, nationality, mother tongue, and other)	Intersectionality Category (structural, political, representational)
12	Milkman	Hagar	He deserted Hagar after a long relationship with her, which made her crazy, and she attempted to kill him. [abandonment]	Gender	Structural
13	Macon Dead II	Pilate	Macon Dead II feels disgusted by his sister's appearance. He feels ashamed if White men who help him in the bank know that Pilate is his sister. [sexism]	Gender	Structural
14	Black women	Pilate	Several Black women "did not like the trembling unhampered breast under her dress, and told her so". [sexism]	Gender	Structural
15	Black people	Pilate	Pilate was deserted because they found her without a navel. "What are you? Some kinda <i>mermaid</i> ?" one man had shouted and reached hurriedly for his socks. It isolated her. [sexism]	Sexuality	Structural
16	Macon Dead II	Ruth	When driving a car with his wife and children, Ruth reminds Macon Dead II that he is driving too fast, and he threatens to walk home if she protests the way he drives. [gender subordination/sexism]	Gender	Structural
17	Macon Dead II	Lena and Corinthian	Macon Dead II did not allow his daughters to marry ordinary people, which made his	Gender	Structural

No	Perpetrators	Victims	Forms of oppression (battering, spouse violence, rape, domestic violence, racism, sexism, race subordination, gender subordination)	Intersecting Identity Category(gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age/generation, ability, disability, nationality, mother tongue, and other)	Intersectionality Category (structural, political, representational)
			daughters spinsters. subordination]	become [gender	

Table 1 shows that the perpetrators of oppression toward Black women are categorized into White people, Black people, and individual Black men and women. The victims range from young to middle-aged and old Black women. The forms of oppression are classified into five categories, namely, racism, violence, abandonment, sexism, and gender subordination. The intersecting identities are race, gender, disability, and sexuality. While the category of intersectionality is dominated by structural intersectionality. Study finds there is no indication of political and representational intersectionality in Morrison's *Song of Solomon*. The data shows the intersecting identity is dominated by race and gender. Sexuality and disability were also found, but not significantly.

Racism against black women and its effects

Racism and segregation are prevalent in the lives of Black people in the novel *Song of Solomon*. For example, the segregation of health facilities, such as the Mercy Hospital. As a member of the Black community, Ruth experiences discrimination in accessing the hospital. Although Dr. Foster has dedicated his life to giving service in Mercy Hospital, he never granted privileges; his daughter and all Black communities were rejected from the service in Mercy Hospital. Ruth marked the end of Black rejection in Mercy Hospital after a deadly incident in which Mr. Smith, a Black man, jumped off the Hospital's roof; therefore, Ruth is admitted to give birth in Mercy Hospital. Morrison says, "It must have been Mr. Smith's leap from the roof over their heads that made them admit her" (Morrison, 2004, p.13). The hospital's refusal to admit Blacks symbolizes the systemic racism in the novel. This segregation in access to healthcare facilities made it difficult for Blacks to receive proper care, and this affected the health of Blacks.

Another scene in the novel that shows the racism toward Black women is when Reba wins a contest. Pilate and Reba relate how Reba often wins many things in a lottery contest even though she does not try to win. On one occasion, she won the first prize, but she was not allowed to appear in the printed version of the photo magazine. This event symbolizes racism, reflecting the exclusion of Black people from public recognition. Reba says, "But they never did put my picture in the paper. [...] But they put the picture of the man who won second prize in. He was White" (Morrison, 2004, p.55). From this excerpt, it can be seen how the Whites mistreat Reba because she is black, and Blacks are not allowed to appear in mass media. This incident illustrates how racism undervalues Black accomplishments, denying them the same visibility and recognition as their White counterparts.

According to Shaw (1996), from around 1861 to 1900, middle and upper-class Black women tended to replicate the Victorian code of conduct, and young women were prepared to become future Black leaders. Black girls were raised and educated to enable them to lift their race. The education was given to them not only to make them fill the professional positions, but they are also expected to be educators, nurses, well-educated mothers, or journalists and activists (Shaw, 1996 in Vallier, 2017, p.11). Macon Dead II sends his daughters to a college to be prepared as educated mothers and wives, then they can contribute to their community's improvement and also find a suitable husband, but if the marriage cannot be achieved, they can take professional positions such as teachers or librarians. Yet the reality proves disappointing: they have to accept that Corinthians can just work as a housemaid in Miss Graham's house (Morrison, 2004, p.197). Carey (1999) contends that through Corinthians' story, Morrison implicitly blames the American education system, which failed to provide a good education for African Americans that would enable them to be well-educated citizens and undertake leadership positions in Black communities (p. 69). Crenshaw's theoretical framework posits that manifestations of racism experienced by Black women should not be perceived as an inextricable element of sexism. Instead, we must treat these instances as a discrete concern. Crenshaw (1991) contends that racism and sexism interact to engender distinctive forms of discrimination that are intertwined and exacerbated. Crenshaw underscores the prevalence of legal institutions' failure to acknowledge these intricate manifestations of discrimination, emphasizing the necessity for a nuanced comprehension of identity and social disparity (Thomsen & Finley, 2019). In the context of educational settings, the concept of intersectionality illuminates how Black women encounter varied forms of oppression that are influenced by the interplay of racism and sexism. This phenomenon often results in invisibility and subordination within educational and professional environments (Macedo, 2023)

Violence against black women and its effect

Besides experiencing racism amid a White-dominant society, Ruth Foster also undergoes domestic oppression and violence. Ruth is the daughter of Dr. Foster, the first Black doctor who lives on Doctor Street and works in the Mercy Hospital. Ruth is the only one of Doctor Foster's daughters; therefore, he nourishes and protects his daughter tightly. It seems that Ruth lives under the pressure of her father, which makes her a dependent woman. Ruth says, "Because the fact is that I am a small woman. I don't mean little; I mean small, and I'm small because I was pressed small. I lived in a great big house that pressed me into a small package. I had no friends, only schoolmates who wanted to touch my dresses and my White silk stockings. But I didn't think I'd ever need a friend because I had him. I was small, but he was big" (Morrison, 2004, p.135).

Having been "pressed small," Ruth is consciously ready to undertake the role of a housewife in an institution of marriage (O'Reilly, 2004, p. 77). By using the expression "I was pressed small", Ruth attributes her relative seclusion to external forces. Explicitly, she is not small, but she is made to be small (Rest, 2018, p. 14). Her body grows well, but her personality is dysfunctional. Her father is the center of her life; therefore, her father's death makes her collapse (Soro, 2007). Fortunately, her life is saved by Macon Dead II, a Black man who marries her. Her

relationship with Macon Dead II, however, is problematic too. While living with Macon Dead II, she frequently experiences violence, both verbal and physical. Following that, Macon Dead II even threatened to kill her, and since that time, he has never slept with her. As Macon Dead II never touched her, she tries to find enjoyment by prolonging her breastfeeding with her son; therefore, her son is later called Milkman by Freddie, who encounters her breastfeeding the boy.

It was one of her two secret indulgences the one that involved her son and part of the pleasure it gave her came from the room in which she did it. office. It was one of her two secret indulgences—the one that involved her son—and part of the pleasure it gave her came from the room in which she did it.... He was too young to be dazzled by her nipples, but he was old enough to be bored by the flat taste of mother's milk, so he came reluctantly, as to a chore, . . . She felt him. His restraint, his courtesy, his indifference, all of which pushed her into fantasy. She had the distinct impression that his lips were pulling from her a thread of light. (Morrison, 2004, pp. 21-22)

Additionally, she regularly visits her father's cemetery for solace and to make herself strong. Ruth says:

Until I thought I'd really die if I had to live that way. With nobody touching me, or even looking as though they'd like to touch me. That's when I started coming to Fairfield. To talk. To talk to somebody who wanted to listen and not laugh at me. Somebody I could trust. Somebody who trusted me. Somebody who was...interested in me. For my own self. I didn't care if that somebody was under the ground. You know, I was twenty years old when your father stopped sleeping in the bed with me. That's hard, Macon. Very hard. By the time I was thirty think I was just afraid I'd die that way. (Morrison, 2004, p.136)

The aforementioned excerpt discloses that Macon Dead II renounced his matrimony with Ruth at a relatively early age, when she was in her twenties. Despite the fact that they continue to reside in the same household, he has ceased physical contact with his wife.

Besides not showing affection, Macon Dead II often uses threats and verbal and physical violence against his wife. For example, when they drive through the downtown area, Macon Dead accelerates his car, and then Ruth reminds him: "You're going too fast, Macon." Ruth pressed the toe of her shoe against the floorboard." Macon Dead II says, "If you say one more thing to me about the way I drive, you're going to walk back home" (Morrison, 2004, p.41). Then, on one occasion, when they have a family dinner, Macon Dead II and Ruth quarrel. It seems that Ruth's response made him angry, and he put his fork down, dropped his hand on the bread plate, and smashed his wife's jaw (Morrison, 2004, p.77). This scene illustrates his cruel treatment of his wife, which encompasses not only psychological abuse but also physical violence.

One of the central female figures in the novel *Song of Solomon* is Pilate. She is Macon's sister, as well as Milkman's aunt. Pilate's life is full of adventure. She begins her adventure following the death of her father after defending his land from

the White people's annexation. Like in the myth "Flying Africans," she wanders off somewhere to survive. Having been left by her brother, she heads to Virginia hoping that she meets some kin of her parents there. After walking for seven days, she meets a preacher's family that gives her a place to stay, and sends her to school; however, she must leave this family when the preacher's wife discovers the preacher patting on Pilate. This is Pilate's first encounter with sexual abuse due to her inability to protect herself, because she is too young, naïve, and does not understand the woman's dignity. Pilate says, "I was so dumb I didn't know enough to stop him" (Morrison, 2004, p.152). Consequently, Pilate has to wander to find a place to stay and temporary jobs to survive.

Another Black woman who gets verbal violence is Mrs. Bains. She is a Black woman who rents a house from Macon Dead. She lives with her grandchildren, Guitar, his brother, and two of his sisters after the death of their father. She does not have enough money to pay for the rent because her money is just enough to provide the children's meals. One day, she comes to Macon Dead's office to tell him her situation, that she is still unable to pay, but Macon threatens to move them off his property if she is unable to pay within several days. It seems that Macon has no sympathy for this old Black woman; he is uncompromising in money matters. Mr. Bains says to her grandchildren, "A nigger in business is a terrible thing to see, a terrible, terrible thing to see" (Morrison, 2004, p.30). Macon's threat to Mrs. Bains to pay the overdue installment, despite being aware of her financial constraints, can be classified as a form of verbal aggression that has the potential to inflict psychological distress and undermine one's emotional state. Additionally, Mrs. Bains is a widow and lacks a stable source of income. According to Crenshaw (1991) physical and verbal violence against these black women is not merely a matter of isolated incidents of racism or sexism. Rather, it is a compounded form of "structural intersectionality," in which both factors intersect to create unique, intense forms of subjugation. Crenshaw (1991) contends Black women are frequently positioned at the periphery of anti-discrimination law, feminist theory, and anti-racist politics, thereby rendering their experiences of violence imperceptible to these prevailing, single-axis frameworks.

Abandonment of black women and its effects

Morrison presents the myth of "Flying Africans" to mark the connection between slavery and abandonment, particularly of Black women. "Flying Africans" is a Black folk tale about the pursuit of freedom from slavery. The tale reveals that owing to the hardship of life in slavery, Solomon flees alone to Africa, but he fails to bring his wife and children. Solomon is the forefather of the central figures in the novel. Désiré (2016) posits that using the flight in a folktale is a bridge to reconnect one with their roots. Milkman traces the origin of Solomon, and through this myth, he finds his true identity. Eventually, he believes that flight is a means of achieving selfhood (Morrison, 2004, p. 49). Ravi and Sheshagiri argue that the presence of myth about flying in *Song of Solomon* is a reflection of Morrison's perspective and attitude toward mythical symbolism (Ravi & Sheshagiri, 2019, p. 1373).

The myth tells that Solomon flees to liberate himself, but he leaves Ryna and his twenty-one children. The narrator says, "She [Ryna] screamed and screamed, lost her mind completely. There used to be more the kind of woman who couldn't live without a particular man. And when the man left, they lost their minds, or died,

or something” (Morrison, 2004, p.330). Solomon’s flight is glorified as an act of a hero. However, Ryna, who becomes the victim of his egoism, is blamed for her inability to take care of herself and her children. According to O’Reilly (2004), ‘flight’ in *Song of Solomon* means both manumission and desertion. Solomon might have liberated himself from slavery, but he abandons his family (Morrison, 2004, p. 102). For Morrison, children need to be reared to understand their past and grow up with strong personalities and self-affirmation. In his flight, Solomon not only abandons his offspring but also ruptures his offspring’s relationship with their mother and ancestral history (O’Reilly, 2004, p. 103).

Another scene in the novel that illustrates an abandonment is when Pilate joins a group of migrants who work as crop pickers; however, she is rejected when they learn that she has no navel. Then, Pilate moves to the city, and she is taken by some other pickers; unfortunately, she is expelled again on account of her stomach. The oppression that she is experiencing is because of her physical flaw. Her navel is not like that of people in common, which results in her being despised. Then, she decides to find a new life “on an island off the coast of Virginia” (Morrison, 2004, p.156). Here, she meets a man and gives birth to Reba, but she rejects marriage because she is afraid that someday, when he learns that she has no navel, he will abandon her. Desperate, she leaves the island with her daughter, wandering for twenty years, and stops after Reba has a baby. Then, she decides to bring her daughter and granddaughter to find her brother, Macon Dead II, in Michigan.

Pilate’s relationship with his brother, Macon Dead II, is not harmonious. It is because he is prejudiced against Pilate that she takes and keeps the gold that they found in the cave. In addition, the life of her sister can be said to be the inversion of his life, which makes him reluctant to accept her as part of his family. Pilate’s appearance, job, and family life, which he mentions as “just like common street women,” make Macon Dead II keep his distance from his sister. Macon Dead II wants to keep a good image of himself and his family:

He trembled with the thought of the White men in the bank—the men who helped him buy and mortgage houses—discovering that this raggedy bootlegger was his sister. That the propertied Negro who handled his business so well and who lived in the big house on Not Doctor Street had a sister who had a daughter but no husband, and that daughter had a daughter but no husband. A collection of lunatics who made wine and sang in the streets “like common street women! Just like common street women!” (Morrison, 2004, p.28)

Hagar, in turn, is a victim of broken love. Hagar feels that Milkman does not love her any longer because of her skin complexion, hair texture, and self-worth, which are inappropriate according to his standards. It is said in the novel that when she looks at herself in the mirror, she frequently says, “No wonder,” “Look at that. No wonder. No wonder” (Morrison, 2004, p.315). Milkman’s rejection eventually causes her to die from a broken heart. Because she loves Milkman so much that her love has blinded her eyes, she is unable to control herself. Rest (2018) states that Hagar is a perfect example of a female who is so easily discarded and forgotten. Milkman finds Hagar is an attractive woman, and their relationship is interesting at first. However, he never sees her as a fully-fledged person, and this abandonment is devastating for her. Hagar’s relationship with Milkman is neither real nor

legitimate; Hagar is completely objectified, and she is manipulated by him (Morrison, 2004, pp. 17-18). According to Hathaway (2019), the way Milkman terminates his relationship with Hagar is as if she were a prostitute; he gives her some money and a note to thank her for her service (p. 4). Rest points out that Hagar's death represents the psychological and physical impact of despair and extreme marginalization (Rest, 2018, p. 19). She dies of a broken heart due to her inability to recover from Milkman's rejection (Gillespie, 2008, p. 171). Crenshaw (1991) views the abandonment of Black women not as a passive absence of support, but as an active, structural failure where Black women are rendered "invisible" by legal, feminist, and antiracist frameworks that treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories. Crenshaw (1991) argues that because Black women exist at the intersection of both racism and sexism, this creates a unique form of vulnerability and marginalization, where Black women are abandoned by legal systems, policy reforms, and social movements that fail to account for their specific experiences. Black women encounter distinctive forms of discrimination that are insufficiently addressed by conventional antidiscrimination legislation, which generally prioritizes the experiences of Black men and White women (Carbado & Gulati, 2013).

Sexism against black women and its effects

Long after Macon Dead separates from his sister, he meets her again. Pilate stays and helps Macon Dead's wife take care of his newborn son and daughters, "but having no interest in or knowledge of decent housekeeping. She just sat near the crib, singing to the baby" (Morrison, 2004, p.28), and something that makes Macon feel uneasy is her facial expression, "surprise, it looked like, and eagerness" (Morrison, 2004, p. 28). Moreover, Pilate's appearance, which resembles a man, makes him feel uncomfortable. Macon Dead has some White business partners; he will feel ashamed if they know he has a sister who is "odd, murky, and worst of all, unkempt" (Morrison, 2004, p. 28). As a consequence, he tells Pilate not to come again to his house till she respects herself and has a proper job. It seems that Macon Dead is concerned with maintaining a positive image and reputation among his business associates. To attain the reputation of a wealthy businessman and to associate with members of distinguished families, he is willing to expel his sister from his life.

Pilate's itinerary is not always comfortable. She encounters a series of rejections, mistreatment, and difficulties along the way. After the previous scene, which depicted Pilate's sexual assault, leading to her withdrawal from the priest's household, which had previously accommodated and educated her, Pilate finds herself in yet another challenging situation. Upon arriving in a city, she does not want to have a steady job where numerous Black communities live. The narrator says, "All her encounters with Negroes who had established themselves in businesses or trades in those small midwestern towns had been unpleasant," particularly, "Their wives did not like the trembling unhampered breasts under her dress, and told her so" (Morrison, 2004, p.154). The women consider Pilate a promiscuous girl who seduces their husbands, thus they refuse her existence in the town.

Pilate moves from the mainland to an island off the coast of Virginia. She worked there for three months doing manual labor, such as hoeing, fishing, plowing,

and planting. On this island, she finds a man and gets pregnant with Reba. Yet, she refuses to marry the man because she is afraid that she will not be able to hide her stomach from her husband forever. Later, after she gives birth to Reba, she lives in seclusion because “the baby's father was forbidden to see her, since she had not 'healed' yet, and she spent some dark lonely hours along with the joyous ones with the baby” (Morrison, 2004, p.157). Then, when Reba was two years old, Pilate took her from the island to the mainland. Now she does not worry anymore about her stomach; she believes that men are terrified of a woman who has no navel (Morrison, 2004, p. 158). However, she frequently gets sexist comments about her appearance. One man shouted to her: “What are you? Some kinda mermaid?” (Morrison, 2004, p. 158). It seems that her flaw without a navel resulted in people isolating her, and “every other resource was denied her: partnership in marriage, confessional friendship, and communal religion. Men frowned, women whispered, and shoved their children behind them” (Morrison, 2004, p. 158). Pilate's life was isolated and secluded, situated at a distance from her familial connections and the individuals with whom she engaged in social interaction. Crenshaw (1989) views sexism against Black women as a unique, interlocking form of oppression. She argues that Black women are marginalized when legal and feminist frameworks treat race and gender as mutually exclusive, rendering Black women's specific experiences of “double discrimination” invisible. Black women are subject to “dual discrimination” due to the prevailing legal and feminist frameworks that tend to address race and gender independently. This approach fails to recognize the unique experiences of black women and neglects to address the intersection of their multiple identities in discrimination cases, thus resulting in a marginalization of their experiences (Rodríguez & Crenshaw, 2024).

Gender subordination of black women and its effects

In a society that adheres to a patriarchal system, in the context of interpersonal relationships, the role of men is of greater importance than that of women, and women should submit to men. This is also reflected in the event in the story when Macon, his children, and his wife are driving a car. Ruth says to Macon, “You're going too fast, Macon. Ruth pressed the toe of her shoe against the floor-board” (Morrison, 2004, p. 41). However, Macon does not care about his wife's feelings, because he feels that the woman does not know anything, and just follows what the men want. He replies to Ruth, “If you say one more thing to me about the way I drive, you are going to walk back home. I mean it” (Morrison, 2004, p. 41). In this scene, Morrison emphasizes how Macon Dead organizes his family so that they submit to him and he is the only decision maker. If Ruth does not obey him, he threatens to leave her, and she must walk back home.

Macon Dead II has two daughters who are thirsty for their father's love. Having received little affection in their life, Magdalena and First Corinthians entertain themselves in the traps of ritual conventions of the Black middle class (Bloom, 2009, p. 36). The surname “Dead” represents that Macon Dead's family is spiritually dead and in a crisis of identity (Ravi & Sheshagiri, 2019, p. 1372). Macon Dead II's lifestyle, which tends to replicate that of the Whites, has deteriorated his reputation in the community. “He behaves like a White man, thinks like a White man” (Morrison, 2004, p. 230). In consequence, the men who want to approach his daughters tend to keep their distance because they think that Lena and Corinthians

are too pampered. They avoid Corinthians because she is more educated than they are. They look for a wife who is willing to work hard, devote herself to family, appreciate them, and be willing to sacrifice for her husband. Corinthians is too elegant for them (Morrison, 2004, p. 198). Finally, Lena and Corinthians are probably not going to marry anybody and become lonely spinsters. Crenshaw's (1991) theoretical framework posits that gender subordination experienced by Black women cannot be reduced merely to the summation of racial and sexual discrimination. Rather, it is conceptualized as a distinct, cumulative phenomenon arising from the interplay of both systemic racism and sexism. This intersection, theorized by Crenshaw, serves as a critical nexus where Black women's experiences of gender subjugation intersect and accumulate, resulting in a complex and multifaceted dynamic. Crenshaw (1991) posited that Black women, situated at the intersection of race and gender, encounter distinctive forms of oppression that frequently elude recognition by both feminist and anti-racist movements, resulting in their legal and political "invisibility."

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the subjugation of Black women in Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* is a complex manifestation of structural intersectionality, wherein systemic racism, patriarchy, and class vulnerability converge. The analysis illustrates how the interwoven oppressions perpetrated by both white society and within the community itself result in severe psychological, social, and economic marginalization, rendering the suffering of these individuals often "invisible" through single-axis analyses. Whilst the present study focuses on the concept of oppression, future research could explore instances of resistance, resilience, and agency among Black female characters in *Song of Solomon* or other texts. Such an analysis would examine how these characters navigate and challenge the intersecting systems of power that are the focus of this study.

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