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Echahid Hamma Lakhder University, El Oued



Faculty of Arts and Languages

Department of English

The Representation of Slavery in the Contemporary Literature: A Critical Analysis of Toni Morrison's A Mercy

**A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of
a Master Degree in Literature and Civilization**

Submitted by:

- ✓ Miss. HOUIDEG Nour El Houda
- ✓ Miss. SETTOU Souhaila

Supervisor:

Mrs. KADDOURI Souad

Board of Examiners:

Chairman/ President: Mr. CHOUCHANI A. Mohamed

University of El Oued

Supervisor: Mrs. KADDOURI Souad

University of El Oued

Examiner: Mrs. GUETATLIA Siham

University of El Oued

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Dedication

We are grateful for every help we received. The list is long, the heart is full, and the way is simple and short: thank you all.

I dedicate this work to my dearest parents: Said and Faouzia who are the reason behind my success; I could never deny their love, encouragement, and prayers. They provide me with strength and hope all the time.

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Abstract

The present research focuses on slavery and its representation in contemporary literature. It deals with issues related to the history of slavery in America, slave narrative and more specifically with the impact of slavery on female psychology. In *A Mercy*, Toni Morrison questions the relationship between slavery and the limitation of life, illiteracy, physical torment and female psychological disorders that slaves suffered from during the seventeenth century in America. The study aims to analyze the literary representation of slavery and its destructive impact on slaves, especially female slaves with an emphasis on the portrayal of the slave experience in religion, education and the slave familial institution. It also explores the role of writing in spiritual freedom as it is reflected in the slave narrative. The analysis makes use of the analytical method in which we refer to the feminist perspective to deal with the black woman's oppression and the psychoanalytic theory to explore the impact of slavery on the human psyche as they suit our analysis. We have chosen *A Mercy* as a primary source of this study due to Morrison's success in her realistic depiction of the experience of slavery from within that affects us as readers. Eventually, this questioning highlights the revival of the theme of slavery in the contemporary literary texts that scandalize the brutality of the slavery system and demonstrate the way female slave tended to resist for freedom and self-assurance. The study resulted in showing that the system of slavery has a subversive impact on slaves especially female slaves' psychology. In addition, it reached that the process of writing has a therapeutic power in healing ones' psychology, reconstructing his identity, and gaining his freedom.

Key Words: Slavery, Slave Experience, Slave Narrative, Woman's Oppression.

الملخص

يركز هذا البحث على موضوع العبودية وطرحها في الأدب المعاصر، بحيث تتطرق هذه الدراسة إلى المسائل المرتبطة بتاريخ العبودية في أمريكا ومدونات العبيد ومدى تأثير العبودية على نفسية المرأة بشكل خاص. إذ تتساءل توني موريسون في روايتها الرحمة عن علاقة العبودية بقيود الحياة والأمية والتعذيب النفسي وبالأضرار النفسية التي عانى منها العبيد خلال القرن السابع عشر في أمريكا. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل التمثيل الأدبي لموضوع الرّق وأثره البالغ والمهدّم على العبيد عامة، وعلى المرأة على وجه الخصوص، بالإضافة إلى تصوير تجربة العبيد فيما يخص الديانة والتعليم وتأسيس العائلة. كما أنها تحاول استكشاف دور الكتابة في التحرر الفكري كما جاء في مدونات العبيد. وعلى هذا فقد قمنا باختيار رواية الرحمة لتوني موريسون كمرجع أساسي لهذه الدراسة نظرا لنجاح هذه الكاتبة في التصوير الواقعي لتجارب العبودية والتي أثرت فينا نحن كقراء. وقد استعملنا في دراستنا هذه المنهجية التحليلية مستعينين في ذلك بالمنظور النسوي لدراسة معاناة المرأة السوداء كما لجأنا أيضا إلى الاستعانة بنظرية التحليل النفسي للكشف عن تأثير العبودية على النفس البشرية، وذلك لكونهما يتناسبان مع تحليلنا لهذا الموضوع. وأخيرا يسلط هذا البحث الضوء على إحياء موضوع العبودية في النصوص الأدبية المعاصرة التي تعمل على الحد من وحشية نظام العبودية كما توضح الطريقة التي تميل بها الأمة إلى المقاومة من أجل الحرية وتأكيد الذات. تتوصل هذه الدراسة إلى أن لنظام العبودية تأثير مدمر على العبيد وعلى نفسية الأمة بشكل خاص. إضافة إلى ذلك، يستخلص هذا البحث أن للكتابة دور علاجي في شفاء نفسية العبد وإعادة بناء هويته وحصوله على حريته.

الكلمات المفتاحية: العبودية، تجربة العبيد، مدونات العبيد، معاناة الأمة.

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General Introduction

Toni Morrison is considered as one of the well-known contemporary writers who reflects different American social and political issues in her writings. She wrote many novels which tackled different issues such as racism, slavery, and female oppression. Among the brilliant novels that Morrison wrote is *A Mercy*. It tells the story of a black slave girl who is named Florens. This girl lived in one of the American plantations in the 17th century which was under the system of slavery. In this novel, Morrison returns back into the specific historical issue in American history when the black people were dominated by the whites' cruelty. *A Mercy* revives the history of slavery in America in order to make the readers know more about the slaves' sufferings at that time. In addition to that, she aims to enable them to understand the facts well as if they happen in the present day.

Morrison's novel, *A Mercy*, is more concerned with female characters. It deals with the slave females and their suffering, which contributes to our choice of the topic. It provoked our curiosity to know about the suffering of the slave woman in the earlier times in America and how she was oppressed, even more than black man was. We are also hunted by Morrison's representation of freedom in order to discover the journey of slaves toward self-definition.

Many researches have been conducted on Morrison's novel. Each researcher has tackled it from a different angle. Maria M. Rahayu Ambarastuti wrote a thesis in 2010 entitled "Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*: The Black Women Slaves' Struggle To Gain Freedom In America In The 1600s". Her thesis discusses the women struggle in the white community to gain their independence. She insists that women should have a strong will in order to obtain their freedom. She adds that the conditions in 1600s were extremely hard where women should stay alive to prove their resistance against whites' segregation.

Michael Miller has also dealt with Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*. In 2008, he posted in *Newsweek Magazine*, an article entitled "Review: Toni Morrison's Poetic *A Mercy*" He says that "*A Mercy* tackles the very origins of American's Blood-soaked racial history". He states that *A Mercy* refers to the earlier dark themes of Morrison's old novels such as racism, violence, and lust, but the race relations, in this novel, are more ambiguous than her other works. For Miller, Morrison focuses more on exploring the issues of power, poverty and the struggle for personal freedom.

In 2014, Manuela Lopez Ramirez has tackled Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* from another angle. She wrote an article under the title "The Pattern of Severed Mother-Daughter Bond In Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy*". She discusses the mother-daughter relation, through Minha mãe-Florens relation. She also depicts the female slave's oppression via mother-daughter separation. She highlights that this separation of the mother-daughter destroys the emotional ties between them and causing terrible effects on their psyches (151).

In 2016, G. Sharmely published an article entitled "Racial Slavery in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*". In the article, Sharmely illustrates that Morrison goes back to the starting point of slavery in America in order to shed light on the meaning of slavery as well as liberation. She examines the experiences of slavery and freedom through the characters of the novel. She discusses how Morrison presented the main characters who were living in the same farm, even though they belonged to different races. She concludes that racism is different from slavery.

Obviously, many reviewers see Morrison as a talented female writer in America. She wrote about different issues like slavery, inferiority of women as well as their struggle to gain liberty. She emphasized the impact of slavery upon human being lives, and more

precisely she focused on the impact of slavery on women. Thus, our study highlights these issues through analyzing Toni Morrison's work *A Mercy*.

The research problem is related to the representation of the issue of slavery as well as obtaining one's freedom in the presence of white's control. We seek to answer some questions related to the impact of slavery on the slaves, especially female slaves' psychology and to clarify to what extent did slave narrative help slaves in recognizing themselves as free souls?

Our research focuses on the slaves' issues and their sufferings under the system of slavery. It deals with a novel written by an African American female writer Toni Morrison and about a black slave girl; Florens. Thus, in order to consider these elements, we tend to use the analytical method in which we see that the feminist perspective is the best way to understand the relationship between the theme of the work and female oppression. In addition to the psychoanalytic theory that helps to get inside the characters' psyches to examine the way they mentally impacted by slavery.

In this research, we tend to organize our work in a way that serves its coherence. Therefore, it is divided into two main chapters:

The first chapter, entitled "Slave Narrative and the Memorization of the Slave Experience", is concerned with the literary representation of slavery in America and its historical, social and cultural background as it is portrayed in the slaves literature or what it is known as 'slave narrative'. The chapter also aims at gaining an insight into the female status at that time concerning labor and sexual abuse.

The second chapter, "The Representation of the Slaves' Life in *A Mercy*", presents a portrait of slaves experiences as it is depicted by Toni Morrison in *A Mercy*. The chapter reflects different issues related to the lifestyle of slaves at that time including education,

religion and daily activities. It also highlights the way the protagonists deal with the discrimination and humiliation they face. Moreover, it examines the psychological impact of the system of slavery on the family institution and the female psyche.

Chapter One

Slave Narrative and the Memorization of the Slave Experience

Introduction

During the 17th century, the black people were shipped into the new land where they have suffered from bad treatment, human segregation, and humiliation. They were brought to be slaves, a property of the white masters. At that time, the slaves were treated like animals, sold like goods, and worked to death. These issues became a subject for many authors and thinkers who have experienced it themselves or portray what happens during the period that proceeds their birth.

This theoretical chapter tries to explore the issue of slavery as it is represented in the slave narrative. The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section attempts to give an overview of the historical background of slavery in America. We also try to give different views about slavery in the American society. The second section sheds light on the slave and ex-slave stories. We try to focus on how these slave narratives convey the real picture of slaves' lives. More precisely, we will discuss how the slave's religion, education and lifestyle were at that time as they are reflected through these narratives.

In the third section of this chapter, we are going to discuss the issue of slavery in regard to women. We focus on reflecting the status of black female slaves in America, during that time, as inferior and inhuman. We also show to what extent female slaves were suffered in the white community and deprived of different rights as they had faced double discrimination; white vs black and man vs women?

1.A Historical Overview of Slavery in America

Racism always divides the world into two groups of people; one group made itself superior and considered the other group as inferior such as man vs woman, west vs east, and black vs white. Black people were considered as inferior to the whites and lost all what is supposed to be their right. They are just created to serve their white masters (qtd. in Salama 13).

In America, Slavery started in 1819, when a Dutch ship brought twenty slaves in Jamestown, Virginia. In the seventeenth century, Europeans in North America made the African slaves as their labor source. During the eighteenth century, historians stated that about six or seven million black slaves were imported to America. They worked on tobacco, rice and indigo southern plantations in Maryland and Virginia. By 1860, slavery in the south had reached four million in cotton producing states. However, in the north, slavery was not widespread and the most of northern states abolished slavery (“Slavery in America”).

In his article, “Slavery is a Positive Good”, John C. Calhoun, a congressman, proclaims that when two races which were distinguished by physical or intellectual differences were brought together, the relation between them was a positive thing. The black, from one hand, came to America as degraded and savages after that they became civilized physically, morally, and intellectually, under the care of the American institutions. On the other hand, there was no civilized society that did not build its civilization and growth upon the labor of the others. Calhoun believes that the relation between the two races in the South was strong which helped in forming stable political institutions. In the civilized and wealthy states, there was a conflict between the working

class and its owners. However, the relationship between slave and slaveholders exempted the South from the dangers resulting from this conflict (qtd. in Torr 24-27).

In the same article, Calhoun views that the system of slavery is positive good for both slaves and slaveholders. It helped both of them by providing good social and political systems. The slaveholders lived from the work of the slaves. In addition to that, Southern masters treat their slaves in a good way which is better than of the employers in the North or in Europe. For Calhoun, this explains why the political condition in the South is much more stable than the North (27).

Slavery forms one third of the southern population in America. Many slave masters owned no more than fifty slaves. Slaves were living only to serve their masters. They were prevented from expressing themselves or taking any action without the permission of their holders. They were restricted to their masters' orders and desires. Learning to read and write was forbidden to them. Even though, there was no legal basis to the slave marriages, they marry and get children but the owners were always trying to separate the slave families by sale and removal ("Slavery in America").

Jean Allain, Professor of Law, defines Slavery as the position of a person where all the powers of ownership are imposed upon him (qtd. in Salama 12). This definition is consolidated by Kevin Bales, Professor of Contemporary Slavery, claiming that:

Slavery is the control of one person (the slave) by another (the slaveholder or slaveholders). This control transfers agency, freedom of movement, access to the body, and labor and its product and benefits to the slaveholder. The control is supported and exercised through violence and its threat. The aim of this control is primarily economic exploitation, but may include sexual use or psychological benefit (13).

In other words, slavery means that one person owns another person and has the right to exploit him or her and considers him or her as his own property. This process aims at exploiting blacks economically and physically.

In his book Atlas of African-American History, James Ciment explains the relationship between the slave and the master as “a part of a modern and dynamic economic system” (53). Slaves were harshly exploited by their masters to gain much more profits. For Ciment, slavery was more than just a labor or economic relationship, masters control the slaves personal life too. As Ciment says: “For slaves, marriage, family, friendship, home, labor, leisure—all depended upon the whims of the master” (53). The institution of slavery helped the American economics to grow up rapidly by producing goods especially cotton production. Ciment supported his view when he stated “Between 1800 and 1860, cotton production doubled every ten years. By the latter year, the American South was producing two thirds of the world’s supply” (53).

In his article, “Slavery is Evil”, Theodore Duight Weld, one of the leading figures of the American Antislavery Movement, attacked the immorality of slavery and the character of the slaveholder. He states that two million seven hundred thousand persons in South America are forced to be slaves. Theodore Duight Weld claims:

The case of Human Rights against Slavery has been adjudicated in the court of conscience times innumerable. The same verdict has always been rendered—“Guilty”; the same sentence has always been pronounced, “Let it be accursed”; and human nature, with her million echoes, has rung it round the world in every language under heaven, “Let it be accursed. Let it be accursed.” His heart is false to human nature who will not say “Amen.” There is not a man on earth who does not believe that slavery is a curse (qtd. in Torr 29).

In an attempt to defend their brutality and legitimize their actions, slaveholders state that their slaves are kindly treated; in other words those slaves are not oppressed in the white community. However, Weld states: “We will prove that the slaves in the United States are treated with barbarous inhumanity; that they are overworked, underfed, wretchedly clad and lodged, and have insufficient sleep;” (31-32).

In his book, Slavery in America, Robert Liston, a former slave, gave an overview about the slaves’ lives in the South. He notes that some were treated harshly by their masters, but others were treated kindly and “enjoyed better housing, clothing, food and working conditions than the white workers in the North” (68). However, he focused more on the typical slave who lived a life of constant labor.

Slavery was seen as destructive system for different reasons. Liston views the reason behind the brutality of slavery in the United States is “the fact that the slave did not win dignity from his toil and privation. Instead, he was systematically humiliated and dehumanized” (qtd. in Torr 44). In contrary to the white man who gains dignity from his hard work, slave just gains humiliation. So that, “most slaves lived in squalor; ate and dressed poorly, and died early deaths” (Liston 77). Moreover, whipping was considered as the famous punishment for slaves who were not working hard enough.

Slave Owners knew that slaves were human beings. They had representations in the congress of the United States and they were protected by laws. The owners had the responsibility to feed, clothe, house, and provide them with human needs. However, other laws tried to hinder the slaves’ human rights. Those laws stated that the slave could not be taught to read and write, and travel or meet with his friends for social, religious, or other issues. His life could not be separated from the presence of the white man (82). For him,

the most dehumanizing aspect was the way in which slaves were treated as property. Slave owners knew that slaves were humans but they were not treated as human beings.

In his article, “The Harshness of Slave Life Has Been Exaggerated”, William K. Scarborough, University of Southern Mississippi professor, contends that some Historians had exaggerated in depicting the harshness of the slave life. Scarborough agrees that “slavery was deplorable” (qtd. in Torr 45), but he uses the historical records as an evidence to note that the slave masters of the old South treated their slaves with kindness. Moreover, they considered it their Christian duty to care for their slaves (45,48). The slaves, for example, were allowed to gain money, receive health care, and grant regular holidays. In addition to that they were engaged in matters on the plantations and their masters took their opinions into account.

Scarborough states that the relationship between master and slave was the same to that between a father and his child; Many slave owners accepted a paternalistic ideology in which slaves were regarded as children for whom they had a moral responsibility, and certainly some slave owners tried to live up to that ideal. Maunsel White said: “we view our Slaves almost in the same light we do our Children.” (48). Just as the father was considered as the responsible for everything in his house, so too was the master considered as the responsible for everything in his plantations. The master treated his slaves with justice, humanity and compassion and he expected obedience, loyalty and good deportment from his slaves (49). Therefore, this gave an evidence that blacks were treated well as slaves, if not as human beings.

Slavery was existed from earlier times. It has affected different thinkers who view this issue differently. Some thinkers believe that slavery was a harmful system which destroys the slaves’ private lives. They also argue that the relation between the slaves and

their owners was subverted. Whereas, others consider it as something good, and believe that the slaves and their masters have a kind relationship. However, the dominance and the control of one person over the other leads to the use of power which highlights only negative effects upon the controlled person. Despite the various views concerning the issue of slavery, it lasts as a harmful as well as a destructive system.

2.Slave Narrative

One of the problems which black people were suffered of was slavery. It existed before even history started to be recorded. The slaves' suffering, at that time, were transmitted from one generation to another by some sort of writing. This writing was mostly stories of slaves or free slaves which were written by the slaves themselves. This writing was well known as slave narrative. It is considered as literary genre that is made up of the written accounts of enslaved Africans in America. It becomes very important in opening debates between blacks and whites about the issue of slavery and liberty. John Sekora also views that the slave narrative refers to the accounts of slave life which made up of the experiences of present or former slave (484).

Slave narrative gives a voice to the black community who used to be previously muted and marginalized in the world literature. Slaves had recorded their experiences in order to break the image given to them in the western literature such as primitive, savages and animal-like. In his book called Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race, E.W. Blyden criticizes the Western literature for not being honest in their portrayal of the blacks as he states: "It is not too much to say that the popular literature of the Christian world, since the discovery of America, or, at least for the last two hundred years, has been anti-Negro." (32). Thus, Slave narrative, as a response to this misrepresentation, provides readers all over the world with a more authentic and reliable evidence of the living conditions of

black slaves in America. It tells the physical torment, traumas and inhumane treatment that blacks underwent in the Southern America. The effective slave narratives reflect the black's social status from different sides.

2.1.Slavery and Religious Expression

Religion has always been a powerful factor in the life of black community. After the arrival of slaves to the New World, Christianity was familiar to most of them. According to Albert J. Raboteau, Christianity had prevailed the slave community, but not all of them were Christians. Even those who accepted Christianity were not all members of the Church. But, the vision and doctrine of life preached by Christianity were known to most of slaves (212).

The slaves were forbidden to attend the regular Sunday to worship God in the local church. Even informal prayer meetings on week nights were illicit by the slaves owners. They did not have the right to read texts from the Bible or attend church or even to pray. As Wash Wilson's experience when he said:

When de niggers go round singin' 'Steal Away to Jesus,' dat mean dere gwine be a 'ligious meetin' dat night. De masters ... didn't like dem 'ligious meetin's so us natcherly slips off at night, down in de bottoms or somewhere. Sometimes us sing and pray all night (qtd. in Ben Mansour 36).

The masters' refusal to grant a slave permission to participate in religious meeting was seen as a kind of punishment because they think that the blacks do not have souls. Moreover, the whites do not want to give the blacks an opportunity to think that they are free.

However, the religious format varied from one plantation to another. As, the former slave, John Brown describes:

Sunday was a great day around the plantation. The fields was forgotten, the light chores was harried through, and everybody got ready for the church meeting. It was out of the doors, in the yard...Master John's wife would start the meeting with a prayer and then would come the singing—the old timey songs. But the white folks on the next plantation would lick their slaves for trying to do like we did. No praying there, and no singing (qtd. in Raboteau 220).

Brown narrates the religious meeting he attended with the members of his plantation in regard to his neighbors who were not allowed to join such meetings. Thus, Some masters allow their slaves to go to church, whereas others do not. In the case of allowing them, all what the white preacher, as Charlie Van Dyke states, talked about for slaves was to serve their masters and not to steal or lie on them. They also insisted on the black preacher to repeat what the white preachers said, because he would find himself in problem if he said different (Raboteau 213-214).

Once the slaves are forbidden to practice the religious rituals, they do them in a secret way, which was a famous characteristic of the slave religious life. Slaves used several techniques to avoid detection of their meetings such as to meet in secluded places like in woods. They used, there, iron pot or kettle turned upside down in the middle of the cabin floor or at the door step to catch the sound. This technique is considered as a common device to preserve secrecy. After that, they pray and sing softly with heads together around and the pot and kettle existed to deaden the sound and to prevent the white from hearing what they are saying (215).

Slaves were often punished when they were caught practicing their religious ceremonies. Moses Grandy states that slaves would be flogged when they found singing or praying at home or attending secret prayer meetings (qtd. in Raboteau 214). The view of Moses was illustrated through the experience of Gus Clark when he reported: “My boss

didn't 'low us to go to church, er to pray er sing. Iffen he ketched us prayin' er singin' he whupped us.... He didn't care fer nothin' 'cept farmin'." (214). Another slave narrates his experience about the master's punishment, Henry Bibb was penalized with five hundred lashes because he took a part in a prayer meeting of slaves in the neighboring plantation without permission. However, slaves did not stop these religious meetings because as Moses Grandy states that they like their own meeting better (214-215).

Despite of the obstacles that slaves faced concerning their religion, they resisted because they thought that the pray is the only way to get their freedom. As George Womble, former slave, confirmed that slaves go to the woods at night to sing and pray to be free. He used to say that someday they will be free, and if they die before that time, their children will live to see it (Raboteau 219). Religious meetings, according to slaves, gave them hope for better future and wishes to help them in their present life. They see religion as a way to feel comfortable and relaxed (218). Thus, songs, clapping, dancing, and even spirit-possession played a big role in refreshing slaves' lives.

2.2.Slave Literacy

Literacy among slaves was a complicated issue. In a slave community, the process of education was forbidden. Literate slaves who could read or write were demanded members by whites. The whites associate literacy with danger and fear. If slaves learn to read or write, they became aware about the inconvenient things in their lives which must be changed. The masters also were fearing of the educated slaves' ability to convince others to make a revolution against their masters. Thus, the slaveholders opposed slave literacy and wanted to keep them reliant and dependent to the system of slavery.

However, some slaves were taught to read and write in secret depending on communal efforts such as family members, preachers, or their masters. Slave narratives

demonstrate that the large number of enslaved people became educated. A number of slaves were taught to read by other literate slaves and others by their masters and mistresses. Philis Wheathy is an example to a slave was educated by her master. Due to the help of her master, she became skilful and able to write poetry for addressing government leaders about the issue of slavery (“education during the slave period”).

There are some slaves got educated with the help of their masters, at the end they were punished. As what comes in the Autobiography of an ex-slave, who was taught by her mistress Betsy, Martha Griffith Browne. She demonstrates that those who were taught by their owners should keep it a secret because anyone caught doing so was often ordered by the court to be whipped in public for the reason that the whites believed that slaves would not obey their owners (Ben Mansour 30).

According to the anti-literacy laws of slaves, any slave person who was caught reading or writing, was punished as were their teachers. As James Fisher, who narrates his story, demonstrates the way their masters used to punish slaves and the ones who helped them to be literate.

...I found an old man who, for the sake of money to buy whisky, agreed to reach me the writing alphabet, and set up copying. I spent a good deal of time trying to improve myself; secretly, of course. One day, my mistress happened to come into my room, when my materials were about; and she told her father (old Capt. Davis) that I was learning to write. He replied, that if I belonged to him, he would cut my right hand off (qtd. in Berry and Alford 262).

Unlike the slaveholders who forbid slaves’ learning, there are others who allow slaves to learn but depending on certain conditions. As an example to that, Anglican Minister established a school for slaves in South Carolina, but under special rules. This school offered instructions, for over twenty years, in Christian religion and under the slave

school master's guidance ("Slavery And The Making Of America. The Slave Experience: Education, Arts, & Culture"). Even though, some slaves have gained the opportunity to learn, they were restricted by certain rules. However, the majority of them have lacked this virtue.

2.3.Cruelty and Mistreatment in the Slaves' Memories

The way the slaves were treated, in the New World, was very harsh and miserable. The moment their journey from Africa across the Atlantic, which is known as the Middle Passage, the slaves started the journey of humiliation and prejudice. In this journey, slaves were packed tightly into the slave ships where they could hardly move. They were kept in undesirable conditions in the ship. Olaudah Equiano describes his terrible experience in the ship when he said: "The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us"(18). In his slave narrative, Equiano portrayed the horrific treatment he faced during this kind of trade where he wished to be dead. Equiano also described the brutality of the white men as something he never dealt with in his life.

When the slaves arrived to America, they were sold to several plantation's owners. Men, women, and children were obliged to work to produce goods like: tobacco and sugar, and they are punished if they refused or they did not complete their works. slaves were treated in a harsh and inhumane way. During work and outside of it, slaves suffered physical abuse, since the government allowed it. They punished them by different ways such as whipping, shackling, beating, mutilation, branding and/or imprisonment ("Treatment Of Slaves In The United States"). More than that, slaves did not enjoy an ordinary family life because they were threatened to separation at any time by selling

them. Among slaves who illustrates this slave experiences and the harsh reality is Frederick Douglass.

Frederick Douglass is a former slave who faced a very brutal treatment and dehumanization in the land of slavery. Frederick Douglass wrote Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass in which he recorded the way black community were humiliated for more than two centuries. Through his writings, Douglass provides readers with an image of the misery that black people underwent on the hands of their masters. He states that “slavery denies slaves of their identity.... Slavery puts constraints on a slave's individuality” (“Frederick Douglass’ Views On Slavery Essay--Abolitionism Oppression”, pars. 1-2). This provides that slaves were considered as animals and were treated as their master's own property, they were sold and given new names and after the end of slavery in America, they still forced to ignore their culture and to assimilate to American culture.

Douglass’ narrative reflects the way slaves were treated by their masters. Slaves were given a monthly allowance of food and yearly allowance of clothing, but children were often seen naked, regardless of the season of the year. Slave killing was never considered as a crime; for whatever little action, example when someone spoke badly about the master, the slaves were killed. Slaves had no right to learn how to read and write because masters believed this will spoil them and only do harm (Milevoj 18-19). Another cruel fact has been received from Douglass’ narrative “is how the masters had a habit of buying women as “breeders”; meaning that they would found them a man to live with in order to produce children which the masters would add to their wealth” (qtd. in Milevoj 19). In other words, women were considered as machines for producing children who were later on taken from their arms and used to satisfy the master's needs only.

In his narratives, Douglass believes that the master would be nicer and friendlier with his slaves when he attends religious meetings. However, he was disappointed with what happened with his master Hugh Auld. Douglass said:

It neither made him more to be more humane to his slaves, nor to emancipate them. If it had any effect on his character, it made him more cruel and hateful in all his ways; for I believe him to have been a much worse man after his own depravity to shield and sustain him in his savage barbarity; but after his conversion, he found religious sanctions and support for his slaveholding cruelty (47).

This indicates the way slaveholders use religion to show that they are doing God's work. In fact, they use religion to brutally exploit slaves, and to justify their cruel actions.

During his childhood, Frederick Douglass was taught how to read and write by Mrs. Sophia Auld, but suddenly her husband prevented her from doing so. At that point, Douglass realized that education was the most important step to achieve freedom and he insisted on learning how to read and write. The turning point in Douglass' life was at the shipyard of Mr. Hugh Auld where Douglass was working as carpenter. Some of Auld's white colleagues were disturbed by the presence of the blacks there, so they planned to kill Douglass. Douglass defended himself and escaped, then, he changed his name from Frederick Bailey as slave to Frederick Douglass as free man (Salama 22-23). From that time, Douglass became an educated man and an abolitionist speaker for all the blacks.

Henry Bibb, a former slave, wrote Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb. In his narrative, Bibb tried to uncover the brutal system of slavery and slave holders. Through the depiction of his mother's life experience, he tried to portray the way their masters look at the slave woman. He presented his mother as a slave woman who produced seven slave sons. All what he knew about his father was just his name which his

mother informed him about (Brown and Shannon 208). In other words, woman in slavery had no sound; she was just subjected to the slaveholders sexual abuses and desires. Her role was minimized to just a machine for producing children.

In his narrative, Bibb also presented the slaves' life at that time by comparing them with the poor class of whites. He said that they were considered morally the same. However, they would be punished differently when they caught committing an offence. The poor class of whites were punished with both lynch and common law, whereas the slaves were punished with lashes. The poor class of whites performed manual labor which put them in an inferior rank to the slaveholders. However, they were better than the slaves who work without payment under the lash (209).

According to what comes in Bibb's narrative, slaves had a great faith in conjuration and witchcraft. They believe that this conjuration had the power of preventing them from being flogged by their masters. This believe was adapted by Henry Bibb, when he knew that he would be punished due to his escape. He went to the conjurers in order to be saved from the punishment (209).

In his narrative, Bibb scandalized the cruelty and inhumanity of the slaveholders at that time. Their brutality reached even the little babies. They even whipped and flogged children because they lacked their parents' protection since all of them were considered the property of the owners. He described what happened to his little daughter, Marry Frances, when she was creeping under the feet of unmerciful old mistress. This mistress lashed Frances on her face because she was crying due to the absence of her mother. The harshness of the mistress appeared in the print hand that she had left on Frances' face for eight days. He added that his daughter, after her mother's return, was not able to utter any word because she was a slave; born of slave mother (210).

As what Bibb mentioned, masters are working on destroying the slave's families either by selling the wife or the husband as in the case of Bibb. The black slave Bibb engaged in marriage with Malinda. However, his marriage did not last because his master sold him to Gatewood plantation (210).

Slaves were dehumanized by their white masters. They suffered in their life in the whites' plantations. The black people were not considered as normal human beings who enjoyed their full rights concerning education, work, life, and religion. That is why, they wrote their stories in a form of slave narratives to reflect their sufferings. The slave narratives, as they dealt with man's suffering, they discussed woman's oppression too. They are used as a means to abolish slavery.

3.Female Slave: Sexual Abuse, Labor and the Limitation of Life

For a long time in the Southern America, Bondage was terrible for men. However, it was more terrible for women. The life of the slave women was more complex than of the slave men. On one hand, the black female slaves were facing physical, mental and sexual abuses by the whites as they are degraded to objects less than being human beings. On the other hand, black female slaves were treated as inferior to black men .

In addition to the great exploitation black women faced in the plantations and in the houses of their owners, they were facing a very inhumane sexual abuse by their owners. "Slavery had a long reaching effects on the conceptualization of the black body" (Cooper 21). The white slave owners claimed all the right to sexually abuse the black females. The slave females were subjected only to the will of the white men (21).

White masters were sexually abusing black women to satisfy their male desires and assert their sovereignty over them. However, this is not always the case, white masters

tended to subjugate female slaves as a way for subjugating their male slaves. Angela Davis in her article “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves” says: “the rape of the black woman was not exclusively an attack upon her. Indirectly, its target was also the slave community as a whole” (12). This attitude creates a profound psychological and mental damage in the black souls as it is directly attacks the dignity of human being.

The slave female has often been victimized not only by the white masters, but also by the black slaves as well. Gail Wyatt states that the black man was forced by his master to have sex with the black women in order to produce children like animals. They used to oblige the black man to have a sexual relationships with several black females without considering their relations to this slave. Their only aim was to produce more slaves to work in the plantations (qtd. in Ben Mansour 29).

Unlike white females, black females were obliged to give up their human nature as being feminine creature. They were working in the same level male workers were working. Many female slaves were “agricultural workers on farms” (qtd. in Ambarastuti 18). They were working hard in dirty and muddy places. This reflects how they start to lose their femininity while trying to provide themselves and satisfy their owners. Darlene Clark Hine and Kathleen Thompson state also that Other female slaves worked as domestic servants in cities with the indentured servants (18).

Black females have no excuses to be absent during the period of work. In the white’s plantation, they are obliged to attend every day, work hardly, and finish the proposed time of working. Despite of her illness or pregnancy, they did not allow her to rest. As Wilma King states that the pregnant woman must work all her pregnancy period without stop. They did not consider whatever her conditions, until her baby was born. They

gave her just a month to recover herself after she born her child. After that, she must continue her work with child on her back (qtd. in Ben Mansour 33).

Even though, the black female worked hard as the male, she was punished harshly for any small fault she did. By doing so, masters aimed to assert their dominance. They whipped and lashed them without pity. Moreover, they punished them as if they were animals. Slave owners acted like butchers who consult their raw meat that hangs in their shops, in this way, they punish the slave females when they are naked. More than that, they did not forgive any woman for any reason even the pregnant woman. Pregnancy was not a barrier to punish slave women; like what comes in Mary Prince's narrative, The History of Mary Prince, in which she described how her master punished Hetty, her surrogate mother. Even though, Hetty is pregnant, her master always abuses her because she was blamed for letting a caw escape. Hetty got a dead child and not long afterwards she died (qtd. in Bos18).

Female slaves lack the experience of living in a family. They were separated from their families to be added to the wealth of the masters. The white masters always try to destroy the relation between the black female and her children. As Mary Prince, a slave girl, said in her narrative that she suffered from the separation of her mother and her family. Thus, the bond between her and her mother cannot compete with slavery's brutality. That is the reason that leads her to fetch for surrogate mother and family members (16).

The institution of marriage is an illusion for slaves. Slave man and woman could not legally marry. They must ask a permission from their owners to do that. Meanwhile, it happened, the couple had no legal protection since the masters could separate the family. Gail Wyatt argues that female slave had no right to love or to marry. She is considered as a

property to her mistress and master that is why she could not have stable relationships. Even if she got married and had built a family, it will be broken by selling her (qtd. in Ben Mansour 30).

One of the texts that came out of a real experience of black female slaves is Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl. It is written by Harriet Ann Jacobs in which she records her personal experience as a slave as she states that: “Only by experience can anyone realize how deep, and dark, and foul is that pit of abominations” (qtd. in Milevoj 24).

In her narrative, Jacobs describes different aspects and terrifying images of slavery. She describes the miserable conditions under which all slaves were living. She also states that slaves were subjects for the bad and unmerciful treatments of the white people. In her narratives, Jacobs tackles the issue of gender in which the black woman is supposed to suffer double discrimination and humiliation. She expresses that the life of the slave woman was more complex than of the slave man. Slave women had suffered from different bad actions practiced against them in their daily life such as sexual exploitations, childbearing, motherhood and abundance .

Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl depicts the disgrace that is faced by two black females in the house of a white family. Harriet Jacobs and Linda Brent were humiliated and sexually abused by their masters. Jacobs was seen as a sexual object for her white master Dr. Flint. She was a subject to his wishes and desires meanwhile she encountered the hatred of her mistress who felt jealous towards her husband. Jacobs says:

O virtuous reader! You never knew what it is to be a slave; to be entirely unprotected by law or custom; to have the laws reduce you to the condition of a chattel, entirely subject the will of another..... Still in looking back,

calmly, on the events of my life, I feel that the slave woman ought not to be judged by the same standards as others (176).

In her book, Jacobs did not blame the mistress for being jealous toward the person she loves, but she blames slavery which creates that jealousy and hatred (Ben Mansour 58). Harriet Jacobs fell in love for many times and in each time she got pregnant. Each time, her master punished her and her children because he considered her as his own property (Milevoj 24-25). Thus, slaves had no rights for protection in the South, then female slaves became an easy target for the exploitation of white male masters.

Female slaves were often oppressed more than male slaves. Slave women lived through severe and prolonged suffering. They were legally held as human property. They were not considered as human beings. They suffered in the white plantations either due to their masters or the black men. This suffering was reflected in different aspects such as the exploitation of their bodies, in work, education, and family life. The black women did not submit to these misery easily, as the slaves in general refused to accept the situation and resisted the slavery system several times.

Conclusion

To sum up, the chapter tended to examine the issue of slavery in America as it is seen as a system where Americans sought to humiliate and control blacks physically, sexually and mentally. In an attempt to give a voice for all the black slaves to express their suffering, some educated slaves tended to write about their experience in a form of a slave narrative in which they tell different stories of the exploitations and abuses they have faced in the plantations. The study also demonstrated the destructive impact of slavery on woman and female psychology.

Chapter Two

The Representation of the Slaves life in *A Mercy*

Introduction

A Mercy, a novel is written by Toni Morrison. It was published on the Post Modern Period. The novel tackles one of the most important issues in the history of America which is the issue of slavery. Morrison wrote this novel in 2008, but she returns back to, the 17th century, the beginning of the New World. In *A Mercy*, Morrison raises the historical events in America, 1680, during the European colonization. Through this novel, Morrison refers to the time in which racism has no place as a ground for slavery. She looks for enabling the reader to understand the facts behind the racialized slavery in the United States of America at the recent time.

The present chapter is divided into two sections. In the first part, we are going to reflect the cultural life of American slaves. Toni Morrison, in most of her novels, used to deal with the aspect of religion. In this part, we attempt to discuss how Morrison tried to represent the Christian religion which unified both the slaves and their masters, and to reflect the different religious aspects that are used in her recent work *A Mercy*. We also try to demonstrate the slaves' suffering because of the discriminatory laws, illiteracy and mistreatment that deprived them from having an ordinary life.

In the second part of the chapter, we are going to clarify the impact of slavery on the female slave's psychological life. We start by expressing the essence of motherhood. We focus on how the system of slavery destroys the bonds between the mother-child relationships especially in the case of Florens and her mother. In addition, we discuss the effect of slavery on Florens's psyche and how the abandonment from her mother affects her personality. We also attempt to show the long journey that Florens had passed through for her self-request. Finally, we try to highlight the power of writing in recognizing the self and gaining freedom from this destructive world of slavery.

1.Reflections on the Slave Experience

1.1.The Role of Religion in the Slave's Life

As literature mirrors all the cultural aspects of life, religion is among the essential topics tackled by writers. *A Mercy* tries to highlight the bond between slaves and religion during the seventeenth century. At that time, blacks and whites were not equal in terms of social ranks and physical traits; but they all united under one single religion. Krupa N. Dyva claims: “the characters in the novel are projected as Christians, God-fearing and faithful. They seek god for help” (146).

Religion in *A Mercy* is highly represented through the use of symbols. Blacksmith is a free black man. In the novel, he is characterized with curative powers. Morrison selected this nickname for a man like him as a connotation to some Christian beliefs. As Genesis, in the Bible, argues that “tubal-Cain, a descendant of Cain, is the name of Blacksmith who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron” (qtd. in “Biblical Myths, Symbols and Concepts in Morrison: Resonances, Departures and Re-inscriptions” 235). Morrison intended by her use of the character Blacksmith to reflect his miraculous power. This magical power was demonstrated; First, when he did a good work in Jacobs farm. The second when he succeeded in healing Sorrow and then Rebekka.

In Christianity, the snake or serpent is a symbol of evil power and chaos from the underworld. It is a hint to the story of Adam and Eve and their association with the sin. In the novel, Blacksmith had built a snake on the top of the gate of Jacob's house. This act refers to the sin committed by Jacob. It reflects Jacob's greed and the fact that he gained his wealth via a slave economy (“The Theme Of Religion, Morality, And Otherness In A Mercy From Lit charts”).

The novel also discusses the presence of God in the humankind's life. Rebekka, a white Mistress, when she was a young girl, she was treated as a slave. Morrison illustrates: "Her father would have shipped her off to anyone who would book her passage and relieve him of feeding her" (68). Thus, Rebekka was shipped and sent to the New World even she is not a black woman. This childhood experience leads Rebekka to a great suspicion of the mercy of God upon her. She believes that religion, as she experiences it from her mother, was a flame fueled by a wondrous hatred. Her belief in God was weak. Her understanding of God was as "a larger kind of king" (68) who could be no grander nor better than the imagination of the believer.

After arriving at the New World, Rebekka came to Jacob's land and got married. When she got her firstborn daughter, she turned away from that church because they refused to baptize her baby. After her child's death, no one was able to take her back to her home. Even the Pastor did not convince her because she believed that they were the cause of her daughter's death. Her view toward God was demonstrated more through her speech with Lina when she said: "I don't think God knows who we are. I think He would like us, if He knew us, but I don't think He knows about us" (73).

After her husband's death and her illness, she returned again to the Christianity because she thought what happened to her is a punishment from the God. As Willard said about his mistress: "She laundered nothing, planted nothing, weeded never. She cooked and mended. Otherwise her time was spent reading a Bible or entertaining one or two people from the village" (128). Through Rebekka's story, Morrison wants to show that God and Christianity are the only riddance of a person's problems. Thus, being away from God's punishment needs following the rules of God.

Lina, as a slave girl, was prohibited by her mistress to attend religious meetings. When Rebekka returns back to Christianity, she used to take Lina with her to the church. However, she did not allow her to enter the church, because Rebekka as a white mistress refused to practice religious ceremonies with a slave as Lina. In here, Morrison tries to reflect the time when slaves were prevented from going to church, attending religious meetings, or praying with their masters. More than that, they were punished when they were caught doing religious rituals in secret.

In the novel, the white indentured servants and black slaves were treated equally, lived the same conditions, and practiced the same religion. Morrison depicts religion through her portrayal of two indentured servants, Willard Bond and Scully. They believe that they saw Jacob's shadow near of the window of the new house which Jacob built before he died. They suspect Jacob's ghost and spirit is haunting the house. This example reflects Morrison's interest in religious rituals and spiritual beliefs.

In their analysis of *A Mercy*, several critics based their interpretations and assumptions on the Bible. David. Z Wehmer argues that Morrison's position towards the Bible is oppositional. Where she uses some Biblical or theological concepts in a particular way to reveal their limitations (qtd. in Stave 2). However, Agnes Suryani explores Morrison's use of the Bible as intertext through Michael Riffaterre who said that the text and intertext are variants of the same structural matrix. Moreover, Suryani based his argument on Henry Louis Gates, Jr's concept of signifying when he said that text (Morrison's novels) can impose demands on the intertext (Bible) as a way of explanation. Suryani views that Morrison's use of Biblical references is to determine either her treatment is ironic or to affirm her theology (3).

Morrison had used religious elements from the Bible as a way of explanation and clarifications to the events and beliefs. She also used religious stories, like the story of Rebekka, Lina, and Willard Bond and Scully, to show that the masters and slaves share the same religion which is Christianity. However, slaves were not allowed to practice religion as their masters did.

1.2.The Power of Knowledge: Slave Literacy

Education was forbidden for blacks in the era of slavery. Slaves were not allowed to learn how to read and write. Their masters put restricted laws that made them illiterate. Different writers tackled the issue of slavery and education in their writings. One of them is Toni Morrison who describes the status of the slaves as they have no right to learn. As she mentioned at the beginning of the novel:

Once every seven days we learn to read and write. We are forbidden to leave the place so the four of us hide near the marsh. My mother, me, her little boy and Reverend Father. He is forbidden to do this but he teaches us anyway watching out for wicked Virginians and Protestants who want to catch him. If they do he will be in prison or pay money or both (12).

This passage indicates how Florens, her little brother, and her mother Minha mãe were studying in a secret fearing of their master's punishment and seeking for having better understanding and better knowledge. They were forbidden to be educated in D'Ortega's plantation.

Slave masters understood that their control over the slaves could not be only based on physical constraints. They believe that knowledge was a power, so they set up laws to state that teaching slaves to read or write is a illegal. Unlike, the whites who could join schools to develop their knowledge, slaves had no such right. So that, they resisted their masters, in a way or another, to learn in secrecy.

1.3.The Discriminatory Laws

Slaves were not considered as ordinary citizens in America. The white people did not want slaves to be knowledgeable and valuable in the society. In order to maintain control over the blacks and to limit their freedom, whites tended to set up biased laws. In her novel, Morrison tries to reflect some of those laws as she writes:

By eliminating manumission, gatherings, travel and bearing arms for black people only; by granting license to any white to kill any black for any reason; by compensating owners for a slave's maiming or death, they separated and protected all whites from all others forever (6).

This quote describes the laws that Local Gentry have made for black people when they lost the war against the army of blacks, natives, slaves, and indentured servants. She stated that Local Gentry turns all the laws to their service and gives the right to any white person to kill any black for any reason. More than that, it repays the masters for any injured or dead slave. By these laws, they protect all the whites regardless of the slaves' rights. However, some whites were against these laws. As it is viewed by the white character Jacob Vaark who is against cruelty and slave's killing without any convinced reason.

A Mercy also highlights the way white's court used to punish blacks through a very cruel law as Morrison says: "D'Ortega identifying talents, weaknesses and possibilities, but silent about the scars, the wounds like misplaced veins tracing their skin. One even had the facial brand required by local law when a slave assaulted a white man a second time" (25). Thus, whenever a black man hurts a white man in an attempt to defend himself, he is supposed to face social humiliation through branding him as a shamefaced. This quote shows that blacks have no right to defend themselves even when they are oppressed or humiliated.

The Southern Americans created new laws to fit their needs and desires. They created laws to kill the slaves, to compensate the owners for the slaves' death, and to protect the whites from the slaves' assaults. These laws tended to demonstrate the inferiority of slaves physically, socially, and politically. As a result of those laws, the slaves activities would be restricted.

1.4.Slave Lifestyle

The lifestyle in the white American communities is different from that of the black African communities. The blacks suffered when they were brought to live in the whites' society as slaves. They faced a severe life starting from their journey which was called the Middle Passage. In *A Mercy*, Morrison portrays the harsh experience of the slaves' Middle Passage as she states:

Everything heats up and finally the men of their families burn we houses and collect those they cannot kill or find for trade. Bound with vine one to another we are moved four times, each time more trading, more culling, more dying. We increase in number or we decrease in number until maybe seven times ten or ten times ten of we are driven into a holding pen. There we see men we believe are ill or dead. We soon learn they are neither. Their skin was confusing. The men guarding we and selling we are black. Two have hats and strange pieces of cloth at their throats. They assure we that the whitened men do not want to eat we. Still it is the continue of all misery. Sometimes we sang. Some of we fought. Mostly we slept or wept. Then the whitened men divided we and placed we in canoes. We come to a house made to float on the sea. Each water, river or sea, has sharks under (143).

Through Florens' mother's voice, Morrison provides the readers with an image of the harsh and difficult experience that the Africans passed by in their voyage across the Atlantic Ocean. Minha mãe tells her story about the misery journey when she was taken with her friends. She narrates how they were put in a small room hardly to breath in and

lacked sanitation. they were not well fed. Morrison presents the slaves in a situation where they wished to die instead of facing this painful journey. She views it as inhuman because it is considered as something against human rights.

In addition to that, Morrison wants to reflect the inner fears and the loss of hope that slaves often reach on the closed rooms. Morrison writes:

I welcomed the circling sharks but they avoided me as if knowing I preferred their teeth to the chains around my neck my waist my ankles. When the canoe heeled, some of we jumped, others were pulled under and we did not see their blood swirl until we alive ones were retrieved and placed under guard (143).

By those words, Florens' mother means that her fate is better to be eaten by sharks than to experience this journey and feel this pain when she saw herself as goods chained from one place to another with no voice. After this shipment, she knew that she would pay a cost that is losing her freedom. Whereas, some of other Africans committed suicide because they did not afford in front of this suffering.

In their book, From Slavery to Freedom, John Hope, Franklin and Alfred A. Moss, Jr. described the experience of Minha mãe as a “veritable nightmare” (36). They explain that those slaves were chained in a way that did not enable their bodies to move. As a result to the narrow space they were chained in, numerous of them died because of illness or committed suicide by jumping overboard (37).

Slaves, who managed to survive in the journey, were taken to the shore of America. After that, they were sold to different plantation's owners to serve them. The new masters had the authority to sell them to build their wealth. In addition to that, they paid them to recover their debts. Thus, slaves were seen as the property of the whites who, the only one, could decide their fates.

Morrison mirrors the slaves' status in America at that time as if there is no difference between them and tobacco as she describes: "...especially here where tobacco and slaves were married, each currency clutching its partner's elbow" (9). Thus, Morrison adds that those slaves were sold as products by considering them inhuman. Slaves were also be given as a payment for debt; for instance, the case of Florens when D'Ortega sold her to cover his debt toward Vaark. D'Ortega offered her in a way that eliminates her humanity and he tried to catch Vaark's attention to the wealth he could gain by selling them; "You sell them. Do you know the prices they garner?" (25). Those words reflect the way D'Ortega and most of the Southern Americans view the black slaves as a commodity. However, Vaark Jacob did not want to buy a slave because he despises the business on slavery which reflects that not all the Americans during that period share the same attitude toward black people.

Morrison's description of slaves' life in D'Ortega plantation shows how they were treated harshly by their masters. She does not justify the scars and wounds in the slave bodies, but she lets the space to the reader to imagine the terrible conditions the slaves are in when she states: "D'Ortega identifying talents, weaknesses and possibilities, but silent about the scars, the wounds like misplaced veins tracing their skin" (25).

In an interview on YouTube channel, Morrison declares that "there is no civilization that did not rest on some form of enslavement whether it was Athens or Moscow, whether it was England or France". This provides that owning the labor of people was a constant in the world (NPR). The common notion of slave man refers to the blacks, whereas, through *A Mercy*, Morrison intended to show that even white people who called indentured servants were concerned with this issue. She opposes the reliability of the laws that enable the indentured servants to gain their freedom after seven years. As she comments:

But in fact, you could be indentured for life and frequently were. The only difference between African slaves and European or British slaves was that the latter could run away and melt into the population. But if you were black, you were noticeable (Norris, par. 7).

Jacob Vaark's plantation is a sample selected by Morrison to portray the bondage pattern at that time where both white and black people were subjected to it. (Kpohoue 100) Morrison used different characters with various races in one plantation such as whites, indentured servants, freed blacks, slaves. Lina is a native American, Sorrow and Florens as black slaves, the two European indentured servants Willard Bond and Scully, and the free black man Blacksmith. Morrison creates a small community in which all of these races get in touch to experience different conditions and face types of injustice.

At the Vaark's plantation, slaves and the indentured servants, Willard Bond and Scully, were working together and experiencing the same slave conditions. They were punished for extra years under the title of slave for any fault they committed. Moreover, they would be the only responsible persons for any wrong action done by their families.

Sold for seven years to a Virginia planter, young Willard Bond expected to be freed at age twenty-one. But three years were added onto his term for infractions—theft and assault—and he was re-leased to a wheat farmer far up north....Theft of a shoat was invented and thrown in just to increase Willard's indebtedness (Morrison 131).

In addition, the indentured servant will inherit his mother enslavement if she dies before finishing the proposed years. To demonstrate this case, Morrison chooses the character Scully who is a son to enslaved woman. After his mother's death, Scully receives his mother contract which he should finish instead of her. He does not know how much the period is to pass, but he realizes that he is the only responsible person to bear the situation of his mother. Morrison illustrates:

Scully, young , fine-boned, with light scars tracing his back, had plans. He was finishing his mother's contract. True, he didn't know how long it would take but, he boasted, unlike Willard's or Lina's, his enslavement would end before death. He was the son of a woman sent off to the colonies for "lewdness and disobedience," neither of which according to him was quelled. Her death transferred her contract to her son (53-54).

Slave women were forced to do harsh work. They were, all the time, under the control of their masters. They would be punished for any incomplete work they did. The white masters whipped them regardless their weak bodies. Most of the time, they were sexually abused and when they got pregnant, even by the whites, their masters would not feel any sympathy toward them.

The issue of sexuality and abusing black females is portrayed in *A Mercy* in different scenes. Morrison demonstrates the sexual exploitation of black females through Minha mãe's experience in D'Ortega plantation. Minha mãe got pregnant, with her first baby Florens, with unknown father. She narrates how her master obliged her and other females to produce babies. They sent them to dark huts where they cannot distinguish who is the man standing in front of them. Minha mãe declares:

I don't know who is your father. It was too dark to see any of them. They came at night and took we three including Bess to a curing shed. Shadows of men sat on barrels, then stood. They said they were told to break we in. There is no protection. To be female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal. Even if scars form, the festering is ever below (142-143).

Minha mãe was also sexually abused by her master D'Ortega. The quote below implies that Florens's mother is abused by D'Ortega and, for that reason; she is kept around the house.

Jacob neared the cookhouse and saw a woman standing in the doorway with two children. One on

her hip; one hiding behind her skirts. She looked healthy enough, better fed than the others. On a whim, mostly to silence him and fairly sure D'Ortega would refuse, he said, "Her. That one. I'll take her." D'Ortega stopped short, a startled look on his face. "Ah, no. Impossible. My wife won't allow. She can't live without her. She is our main cook, the best one." (17).

As a reaction to what is experienced by the mother, she does not want to put her daughter to same fate. That is why she sent Florens because she found D'Ortega plantation as place with no protection for female slaves.

Through *A Mercy*, Morrison takes readers to the beginning of the New World. Where she tries to uncover the reality of slavery where both blacks and whites including Africans, Native American, and some European servants were considered as their masters' property. They were harshly treated either physically or mentally.

2.Slavery and its Psychological Impact on the Female Slave

2.1.Motherhood

In the South, The black woman suffered more than man. She is often forced to have sexual relationships with her master which leads her at the end to produce babies. Then, she is the only one who assumes responsible to protect and take care of her children. According to Chodorow Nancy and Jane Flax that "the continuity and lack of separation in the mother-daughter relationship have enormous implications in the female self, shaping her personality. A girl maintains her identifications with the presence of her mother" (qtd. in Ramirez 153-154).

The system of slavery has destroyed the concept of maternity. For that Morrison, in her novel, focuses on the impact of slavery in breaking the bonds between the mother and her child. She says that this relationship is "disrupted by the outer violence" (154) that is

imposed on them by their masters. In other words, slavery affects the relationship between the mother and her child negatively. Thus, fearing of the negative impact of slavery on the children, the mother works on bringing them away from that cruel world.

In most of her novels, Toni Morrison focuses on the particular treatment of the female characters and gives a big attention to the experience of motherhood. She defines motherhood as “the complex state that is influenced by powerful biological, psychological, and cultural forces” (Gallant 34). These cultural forces, as in *A Mercy*, are the system of slavery and especially the way whites used to abuse the black women sexually. In other words, motherhood is opposed by social imperatives of the white society that reduce women’s role to reproductive units. However, in the absence of slavery, motherhood used to enable women to realize their importance rather than destroying their souls (Ulmanova 4).

In *A Mercy*, motherhood is illustrated through the relationship between Florens and her mother Minha mãe. At the beginning of the novel, they had an ordinary relationship, till the arrival of Jacob Vaark. Their relationship was destroyed there. Due to the harsh world of slavery in D’Ortega plantation, Minha mãe saw a mercy in Jacob’s eyes, that leads her to send her daughter with him. Her aim was to protect her child from the cruelties she faced. She did not want Florens to be sexually abused and not to live what she herself experienced there. Thus, the destruction of this relationship, motherhood, creates a psychological and mental impact on Florens’ psyche. All the time, she thinks that her mother chooses to protect her little brother instead of her and that she is the responsible of all her problems.

However, motherhood is also portrayed in a very different way in the novel. For Sorrow, motherhood is hope. Before she got her baby, Sorrow was a slave girl who

suffered from the cruel world of slavery. Sorrow is said to be ‘mongrelized’ which might be one of the reasons for being unwelcomed and unwanted in the household where people there said she only brings bad luck. When she gave birth to her daughter, she resisted the system of slavery spiritually. She recognized herself as she was completed now and owned herself mentally. Thus, the reconstructed relationship between Sorrow and her daughter formed a kind of resistance to the system of slavery.

From the novel, it can be understood that slavery, from one hand, breaks the bounds of the relation between the mother and her children. From the other hand, motherhood can be considered as a kind of resistance against slavery. However, it is impossible to find both of them together. Motherhood affects the psychology of the mother or her child negatively or positively. When the mother loses her relation with her baby, it has a negative impact on his/her psyche. Whereas, in the presence of a new born child, the mother’s psyche will be affected positively where she feels complete and realizes her importance.

2.2.Trauma

The word trauma, originally refers to an injury inflicted on a body. In medical and psychiatric literature, and most centrally in Freud’s text, the term trauma is understood as “a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (Caruth 3). Trauma is not recognized for the first time when the event happens, but rather in “the way that it was precisely not known in the first instance then returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4). Trauma is not just considered as a simple illness of a wounded psyche. “It is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available” (4).

Psychoanalytic schools have studied the neurotic reactions that arise among certain groups, or individuals in certain situations. In the third chapter of Beyond the Pleasure Principle, Sigmund Freud has dealt with a pattern of suffering that is mysteriously persistent in the lives of certain individuals (Caruth 1). He views that these repetitive sufferings are striking because “they appear as the possession of some people by a sort of fate, a series of painful events to which they are subjected, and which seem to be entirely outside their wish or control” (1-2).

For explaining the way trauma is operating in the human mind, Sigmund Freud depends on a story which is told by Tasso in his romantic epic “Gerusalemme Liberata”. In this story, Tancred as the hero killed his beloved Clorinda in a fight, without intention, when she was hidden herself in the enemy’s armour. He went to strange magic forest after her funeral. Tancred slashes a tall tree using his sword, at the same time he saw blood streaming from that cut. More than that, he heard Clorinda voice, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, complaining that he had wounded his beloved once again (16). Thus, the actions of Tancred, unconsciously wounding his beloved in a battle and then wounding her again, represent the way the experience of a trauma repeats itself.

The unwitting act of the injury and its unwished for repetition are not the important things but rather the sorrowful voice that released through the wound. As Cathy Caruth, Professor of Humane Letters, states that “Tancred does not only repeat his act but, in repeating it, he for the first time hears a voice that cries out to him to see what he has done. The voice of his beloved to bear witness to the past he has unwittingly repeated... and he himself cannot fully know” (2-3).

In response to Freud’s analysis of trauma, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis state that trauma results from the lack of protective mechanism. The treatment of

trauma gives the traumatized individuals a chance of healing, not by forgetting or ignoring things, rather they can find the core of trauma and accept the facts as memories. After the acceptance of trauma, the victims will continue their lives positively (qtd. in Hsieh 2). Schreiber also states that the effect of trauma varies with the variation of periods of life in which trauma occurs. Accordingly, children are more vulnerable to trauma than adults due to their psychic integrity. The major cause of children traumas is the separation from their parents (3).

According to what Schreiber said, Florens is hunted by the trauma of abandonment. Morrison portrays Florens' mother, in her novel, as she suffered from the sexual abuses by her master D'Ortega. She did not want her daughter to live what she had lived. She knew well that a woman in slavery has no protection when she said: "To be female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal. Even if scars form, the festering is ever below" (Morrison 142), that is why she sent her daughter with Jacob Vaark. She saw Jacob Vaark as a man who sees her daughter as a human child, so she wanted to protect her. However, Florens did not understand her mother's behavior as a mercy or a kind of protection but she believes her mother's aim was to "stand hand in hand with her little boy" (10). Florens' abandonment by her mother caused her a trauma.

Florens' abandonment was repeated for the second time which caused her a second trauma. This time Florens was abandoned by the Blacksmith, the person she loves. According to Morrison, when Florens brought to Vaark's plantation, with time, she fell in love with the Blacksmith. She found this love the only way to compensate the experience of abandonment she had lived, but the truth was against that. She loves the Blacksmith till she loses herself as Florens says:

You are my protection. Only you. You can be it
because you say you are a free man from New

Amsterdam and always are that. Not like Will or Scully but like Sir. I don't know the feeling of or what it means, free and not free. But I have a memory. When Sir's gate is done and you are away so long, I walk sometimes to search you.... You are my shaper and my world as well. It is done. No need to choose (64-66).

Depending on Schreiber view, Yi-jo Hsieh argues that "this passionate love provides a "mirrored self" for Florens to immerse in the illusion that she never separates from her mother." (4).

However, the presence of Malaik in the Blacksmith's life was not good for Florens. The old story repeated itself as it reminds her of her abandonment. She compared Malaik with her little boy who had gained all her mother's love and attention, that is why she attacked him while waiting for the Blacksmith. She felt as if she is abandoned again when he calls Malaik's name first, she said: "Tight. No question. You choose the boy. You call his name first." (Morrison 125). She stated: "I am lost. No word of sorrow for knocking me off my feet. No tender fingers to touch where you hurt me." (125). In response to her, Blacksmith said, "you are a slave....your head is empty and your body is wild... Own yourself, woman, and leave us be.... You are nothing but wilderness. No constraint. No mind." (126). These words lead Florens to lose herself and get into the trauma of abandonment again.

In her way searching for the Blacksmith, Florens met Widow Ealing family. This family consists of the mother and the daughter Jane. They had an affectionate relationship which touched Florens' heart. Jane was seen as a demon in her village because "one of her eyes looks away, the other is as straight and unwavering as a she- wolf's" (97). Widow Ealing did her best to save her daughter from punishment. She teaches her that demons do not bleed and that by making her legs bloody she can prove herself. Thus, the relationship

in Ealing family and Ealing protection to Jane reminds Florens of her mother who is not with her to teach her things as well as protect her.

Another trauma happens with Florens when she had faced an incident in which creates a traumatic reaction on her. As Florens met a little girl in the village. The girl hurts Florens by her reaction when she got frightened from Florens' darkness. Morrison said that the girl did not only "screams and hides behind the skirts of one of the women " (101), but she said "it scares me; it scares me" (102). This traumatic scene is presented by Frantz Fanon in his book Black Skin, White Masks but through different characters. The story says that there was a frightened boy who screams when he met a black man saying: "'Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened!' Frightened! Frightened! Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible." (Fanon 84).

Florens is also traumatized by the Whiteman gaze. As Morrison considers it as the trauma of racism which is: "the severe fragmentation of the self" (qtd. in Hsieh 4). Florens describes the Whiteman gaze and how they stare at her body as the following:

Eyes that do not recognize me, eyes that examine me for a tail, an extra teat, a man's whip between my legs. Wondering eyes that stare and decide if my navel is in the right place if my knees bend backward like the forelegs of a dog. They want to see if my tongue is split like a snake's or if my teeth are filing to points to chew them up. To know if I can spring out of the darkness and bite. Inside I am shrinking. I climb the streambed under watching trees and know I am not the same. I am losing something with every step I take. I can feel the drain. Something precious is leaving me. I am a thing apart. With the letter I belong and am lawful. Without it I am a weak calf abandon by the herd, a turtle without shell, a minion with no telltale signs but a darkness I am born with, outside, yes, but inside as well and the inside dark is small, feathered

and toothy. Is what my mother knows? Why she chooses me to live without? (Morrison 104).

This quote explains that Florens understands that she is in danger and she should protect herself by the letter her mistress has entrusted to her. Hence, Florens said: “Sudden it is not like before when I am always in fright. I am not afraid of anything now. The sun’s going leaves darkness behind and the dark is me. Is me. Is my home.” (104). After that, she understands that writing has a power of protection which leads her to write her story to protect herself from the cruel world of slavery.

Morrison, indeed, emphasizes the power of writing in A Mercy in the penultimate chapter, when Florens said: “In the beginning when I come to this room I am certain the telling will give me the tears I never have” (138). Courtney Crowder states that this novel started by Florens saying “Don’t be afraid” (3) and ended with her saying “Are you afraid? You should be” (138). In this way, Morrison wanted to convey that Florens had gained a kind of growth. She ends much more like what her mother wanted her to be (qtd. in Hsieh 8). According to Judith Herman, “remembrance and mourning, by which the traumatized person tells her/his story of the trauma, are central tasks of recovery”(8). Thus, Florens’ tears indicate that she is in the process of healing by reconstructing her traumatic memory.

Florens’ traumatic experiences originated in her misunderstanding of her mother’s behavior. On her journey of self-request, she suffers traumas due to her mother’s abandonment, her color, and her rejection by the person she loves. She expresses her trauma by writing her story as a way of confession. In Sir’s house, after she runs from the Blacksmith, she crafts her story in the walls of Jacob’s house. The consequence of her confession reveals the traumatic core in her mind, which makes her healing, at the end of the story. Thus, Florens finds power in words. At the end, she burns her Sir’s house to express her pain against the cruel and injustice life she passed through. This action leads

Florens to know that she has become wild, but she says that she is still Florens (Morrison 141). By doing so, Florens ends up owning herself.

The main character Florens wrote her story as a kind of healing to get her trauma out. In this case, writing has a therapeutic purpose in which the person focuses on what hurts and traumatizes him. The therapy of writing will enable that person to enlighten his trauma, to understand it, and after that to deal with it. By writing down the traumatized experience, as a way of confession, then the person is in the process of healing.

Conclusion

In the 17th century, Slaves were culturally deprived from many things. In her novel, Toni Morrison reflects the limitations that were imposed on slaves by their masters. She demonstrates how slavery affects human being and contributes in the destruction of slave's psychology. Moreover, she focuses on clarifying the way slaves tended to reconstruct their lost identity.

General Conclusion

This study showed that the issue of slavery in literature is very complex and cannot be understood apart from its historical and social context. It is very essential to engage some historical facts and personal records in order to get a clear and truthful image of the slave experience.

Our analysis of *A Mercy* has shown that slavery, for a long time, causes destruction of the slave life. Slaves were prevented from the very basic rights like freedom, education, religious expression and marriage.

This study also examined to what extent female slaves were harshly treated as they had a limited life and sexually abused. They were obliged to have sexual relationships with their masters who used their bodies to satisfy their desires as well as they used them with the black men in order to produce new slaves like machines. This cruel treatment reflects the status of female slaves in the white patriarchal society.

The study also illustrated the impact of the physical and sexual oppression of women. The system of slavery plays a big role in breaking the relations between the slave woman and her surroundings. Slavery breaks the bonds between the mother and her child. On one hand, the mother loses herself in the absence of her child. From the other hand, the child's personality would be destroyed for the reason that there is nothing now to power and reinforce him. Their separation due to slavery was harmful to both of them. Morrison succeeded in depicting the loss of identity, the psychological disorders and the traumatic shocks that encountered the female protagonists because of slavery.

The study focuses on the psychological effect of slavery on some of the novel's main female characters who suffered of trauma because of the treatment they encountered. It demonstrates that slavery influences the slave psychology negatively.

Our study demonstrated also the way Morrison insisted on the power of art in creating relief and freedom to the slaves. Their fears, delusions and muted voices would be vanished as soon as they start putting their emotions and inner thoughts into words. For slaves, writing or the slave narrative was the only thing that takes away the physical and emotional burden they have. It gives them the power to resist and ensure their existence.

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