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**Trauma and the Pariah Status in Toni Morrison's
Beloved and *A Mercy***

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of the requirements for a **Master degree in English Language, Literature and
Civilization**

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Dedication

To my Beloved and precious Parents: my Father *Zahir* & my Mother *Fatiha Nadia*

I gratefully acknowledge their love, support, encouragement and belief in me.

To my dear Sisters:

Ryma, Souhila, Souad and Sabryna

To my dearest Grand-Parents to whom I wish a long life

To all the members of my family

To my little lovely *Rayane*

To all my old and new Classmates and Friends, especially *Zahra & Célia*

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Abstract

This Research work studies Trauma and the Pariah Status in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. In her historic fictions, Toni Morrison depicts America in the bleak era of slavery. *Beloved* is set in 19th century America whereas *A Mercy* is set in 17th century when slave trade was still at its infancy. Through her characters' traumatic experiences, Morrison illustrates the traumatic history and story of the African American people. Upon examination of these experiences, illustrated in the two books, it becomes clear they resulted from the historic trauma of slavery with which the slaves of both sexes were grappling. This work explores Trauma theory as a theoretical approach to prove how the characters' traumas bring to the foreground their self-estrangement and dissociation, and how their dissociative state impels them to become pariahs. This dissertation reveals the predicament of the blacks who live like pariahs within their own marginalized community.

Key words: slavery, trauma theory, traumatic experiences, historic trauma, dissociation, pariah.

General introduction

General Introduction

My intent to write a Master dissertation in African American studies has come after my interest in the American history of slavery and my admiration of the African American writer Toni Morrison. My first encounter with the influential Laureate Toni Morrison happened some two years ago when reading her masterpiece *Beloved*. This inspiring novel about history has triggered my attention to her other literary works, among them *A Mercy*. Being interested in the history and literature of the African Americans, I have opted for the two influential historic fictions *Beloved* and *A Mercy*.

The subject of this present research work is Trauma and the Pariah Status in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. These novels are written by Toni Morrison who devoted her rich body of writings to write of her people and their predicament. They are narrated in flashbacks and memories and shed light on the marginalization of the African American community. Most of the characters' horrific incidents stem from the ravages of slavery and racism because both novels are set in the era of slavery.

In this research paper, the final aim is to study the trauma and represent the pariah status of the black characters in the two books. Throughout the analysis, we will see that these characters endured harsh experiences that traumatized them both physically and psychically, for instance the trauma of rape, abandonment, infanticide, shipwreck and smallpox. I will argue that trauma is what turned these characters to become pariahs because it is the major cause for their dissociation. All what occurred within these characters' lives can be explained through trauma theory.

In this research work, I chose to apply the contemporary theoretical framework of trauma theory because it is the most appropriate theory that can analyze trauma and show how trauma is the cause for the characters' pariah-status. I will assert this by studying the two historic fictions of Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, a magnum opus written in 1987, and *A Mercy*, its prelude written in 2008. Both of them revive the bleak untold historic trauma of slavery.

I chose to deal with these two literary works, *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, because in both of them Toni Morrison engages in an act of unveiling the traumatic history of slavery through the perspective of her pariah black people. Each of her works provides insights into the complexity of the black community. Both of these novels revolve around the story of one or many pariah figures. Through her large array of characters, she depicts and treats the pariahs and their traumatic experiences in the African American society. In each of these two novels, there is this pariah figure that, with his traumas, embodies the whole black community. Pariah is the key word used by Morrison, once in a conversation she says:

"There are several levels of the pariah figure working in my writing. The black community is a pariah community. Black people are pariahs. The civilization of black people that lives apart from but in juxtaposition to the other civilizations is a pariah relationship. In fact, the concept of the black in this country is almost always one of the pariah" (Taylor-Guthrie 168).

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison takes us on a journey to the remote bleak past of slavery through the personal stories and experiences of her miserable characters. With the ex-slaves Paul D, Sethe and Baby Suggs, Morrison embodies her black people and their traumatic

history. Through flashbacks and memories, we discover the trauma in which each character is grappling and becomes consequently a pariah. It is around the black character Sethe's infanticide that the story of this novel revolves. She murdered her daughter Beloved and the latter was later reincarnated and it is from this that the novel takes its title, *Beloved*. This incident causes pain not only to Sethe but also to her daughter Denver and to all those that surround her. Due to her horrible deed, Sethe is unfortunately rejected by the community and becomes a pariah.

In *A Mercy*, we are taken back to colonial America during which slavery was still at its infancy. In this novel, we are immersed in the life of the black female protagonist Florens who is offered as part payment of a debt to a trader named Jacob Vaark. Through Florens' memories and flashbacks, we discover other characters who, like Florens, have survived traumas in their lives. All of them are struggling with their orphanhood and solitude and ended up becoming pariahs. This novel takes its title *A Mercy* from Florens' abandonment which is out of her mother's mercy and from Jacob Vaark's mercy to have sheltered all of Florens, Lina and Sorrow in his farm. It is through all these characters and their traumas that Morrison puts us in the heart of the experiences of her alienated black people.

When reading *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, we find that they are very similar in many ways. Firstly, they are both written by the same writer Toni Morrison. Secondly, they are two historic fictions that evoke the history of slavery and portray the black community. In fact, *A Mercy* is considered a prelude to *Beloved* because in *A Mercy* Morrison went back to the very beginning of slavery. Thirdly, these two novels are both written with the techniques of memories and flashbacks and their stories are told by the characters themselves. Fourthly, there is resemblance between these two books because they share the same themes like: slavery, motherhood, abandonment, alienation and trauma. Delving deeper into their stories,

one discovers that under the harsh circumstances of slave life, the two slave mothers, Sethe's and Florens' mother did a heroic act to rescue the lives of their daughters. The protagonists Beloved and Florens are both black females who have been abandoned by their mothers and who may never exorcise that abandonment.

Beloved, Toni Morrison's masterpiece is a timeless, outstanding and rewarding book that inspires many literary critics, scholars and students. So much ink has been spilled to make critical studies of *Beloved*.

In *Bloom's GUIDES: Toni Morrison's Beloved*, we also find the summary of *Beloved*, in addition to many essays of literary critics written on many themes evoked within *Beloved*. Pamela E. Barnett writes "*rape and supernatural*" in which she contends that Toni Morrison's *Beloved* is haunted by the history and memory of rape. She highlights *Beloved's* rape survivors and argues that rape is the most horrific incident experienced by those characters.

In *Toni Morrison's Beloved, A Casebook*, we find a detailed and consistent analysis, an essay entitled "Margaret Garner and Seven Others", written by Samuel J. May. It narrates the true story of the fugitive slave Margaret Garner by whom Toni Morrison is influenced and inspired to write her novel *Beloved*. Within this essay, we find details about Margaret Garner's incident of infanticide and the whole story.

In his article, *Tracing Rape: The Trauma of Slavery in Toni Morrison's Beloved*, Dr Robin E. Field explores the trauma of rape in *Beloved* and shows how it is reflected through the characters. In his article, he explains how Toni Morrison mentioned the trace of rape obliquely and seeks to offer glimpses into this traumatic event. This work will be of great help in the analysis of the trauma of rape in *Beloved*, though Dr Robin E. Field does not give

a detailed analysis of rape on the characters of Paul D and Sethe as I will do in this dissertation.

In “Psychological Criticism of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*”, Larrick Shelby shows that the trauma of slavery and the psychological repression of the past are what caused pain and suffering to *Beloved*’s characters. In her article, she underlines repression as the central cause for the characters’ pain and loss of self. Through this article, we learn that Morrison’s characters opted for repression to forget about their painful past of slavery. She analyses the psychology of the characters: Sethe, Paul D, Denver and Beloved in terms of trauma and slavery. And in her analysis, she focuses mainly on the protagonist Sethe Garner to demonstrate that her traumas caused suffering not only to herself but also to the others and influenced their lives. She discusses Sethe’s psychology with reference to her mammary rape and infanticide. Larrick tries to justify Sethe’s infanticide by relating it to love and sacrifice. Moreover, she tries also to show that Beloved’s reincarnation occurs for one reason which is revenge. In this article, Larrick also refers to Pamela E. Barnett’s and Robin E. Field’s articles to discuss the trauma of rape in *Beloved*. She identifies rape as the psychological trauma that Toni Morrison uses to describe the sepulcher of slavery.

After reviewing *Beloved*, I have noticed that there are so many works that studied it from many different angles. They vary from thesis, books, essays, articles and literary criticism. The New York Times selected *Beloved* the best novel of the past twenty five years. *Beloved* received a considerable amount of criticism from its publication in 1987 till now because it is a masterpiece in world literature.

Compared to *Beloved*, *A Mercy* has not been so much reviewed and studied because it has been published recently in 2008. Therefore, along my research, I have not found so many critics and works dealing with this novel.

In her article, *They Hatch Alone: The Alienation of the Colonial American Subject in Toni Morrison's A Mercy* Jimenez Teresa. G offers a detailed analysis of the major characters illustrating the novel of *A Mercy*, like: Jacob Vaark, his wife Rebekka and his servants Lina, Sorrow and Florens. All of them embody the "community of the isolated". Throughout the article, we learn about the alienation of these characters and their suffering from motherlessness which brings about their orphanhood. This article is relevant to my dissertation because it shows that the major cause for the estrangement and alienation of *A Mercy's* characters is orphanhood. Teresa depicts in her article the ghost of alienation which inflicted pain on those characters and put them on the margin. This article will be of prominent importance in the study and representation of the pariah figures Sorrow, Florens and Lina because it offers a detailed account of those three female characters.

The article "Trauma and Healing: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Florens' Confession in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*" is relevant to my research because it puts emphasis on the underlying theme of abandonment in *A Mercy*. In his article, Yi-jo Hsieh analyses the trauma of abandonment in the life of the protagonist Florens from Cathy Caruth's perspective and with reference to trauma theory. He shows how the black female slave Florens is haunted and traumatized by her mother's abandonment and the villagers' weird gaze in the wilderness.

In *The Theme Of The Shattered Self In Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye And A Mercy* Manuela Lopez Ramirez discusses the theme of the shattered self with a comparison between two of Toni Morrison's works *A Mercy* and the *Bluest Eye*. Her article is relevant to my

dissertation because it offers entries to the themes of alienation and dissociation that will be discussed in the last chapter, as an aftermath of trauma. Manuela says that "the splitting of the self is a familiar theme in Toni Morrison's fiction" (75). She claims that "trauma brings about ostracism and, finally, may lead to the destruction of the sense of the self" (77) In saying this, she tries to show that trauma is what causes the shattering of the self. This claim does not differ from the aim of my study, as I will show in the analysis, how the characters' traumatic experiences, in *Beloved* and *A Mercy* caused their self-estrangement.

I have not chosen Trauma Theory at random. This approach is appropriate to the objective of my research that's why I have opted for it. In addition to this, trauma theory has been largely used by critics to study *Beloved*.

Trauma theory originates from the domain of psychoanalysis and psychiatry. It is a new field of study in literary criticism that gained significant attention contemporarily with the publication of Cathy Caruth's book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. It has been discovered and explained by psychologists, clinicians and critics such as: Cathy Caruth, Kale Tal, Jefferey .C Alexander, Michelle Balaev, Judith Herman and Ron Eyerman. To discuss trauma theory, I have focused on three important works. These works will simplify trauma theory and provide the necessary information for its application.

The first one is a book entitled *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, written by the critic Cathy Caruth who popularized trauma theory. In her book, Caruth simplified this theory by providing definitions of the key concepts, trauma and trauma theory. This book is relevant because it approaches trauma theory through application rather than giving an outline of what it might constitute. She explains that trauma is the return of the repressed and explains how the effects of trauma stem from re-memory and bring to the

understanding of traumatic experience. In her book, she also shows that history is traumatic. Therefore, my reference to her work will be of great benefit to my dissertation because it will help in demonstrating how the history of slavery is traumatic, and how it constitutes the trauma of the whole African American community not of a single individual.

The second reference is *Contemporary Approaches In Literary Trauma Theory* written by Michelle Balaev who is also a literary critic and who introduced trauma and adopted dissociation as a key concept of the theory explaining how it may be a response to any traumatic experience. The third one is *Trauma and Recovery* written by Judith Lewis Herman in which she explains how the trauma survivor gets traumatized with the remembrance of the trauma. She studies the clash between remembrance and repression and demonstrates how the remembrance of trauma produces emotional distress, anxiety and disorder. My references to these earlier works will inform my analysis of trauma and show how trauma is present in the lives of the characters who become pariahs.

Through the application of trauma theory, I will try to answer the following research questions. What are the characters' traumatic experiences discussed in the two literary works *Beloved* and *A Mercy*? How do the characters that experience trauma become traumatized? How does the trauma of infanticide result from rape? How does the operation of repression cause dissociation? In terms of trauma, how can the characters' pariah and dissociative state be its consequence? To answer all of these questions, I will try to analyze first the traumatic experiences of the characters in the two books with reference to Trauma Theory, and then explore the pariah figures in order to prove that trauma brought about their dissociative and pariah status.

My research paper is obviously divided into two prominent chapters. The first chapter is entitled "Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy*: Text and Context". It is devoted to the textual study and socio historical context of the two books involving their plot summary, setting and common themes. It also includes the biography of the author and the historical background of the two books. This chapter will also provide a synopsis of trauma theory in which a detailed entry to the theory will be given with prominent texts that state the definition of the theory and the concept of trauma. It will also simplify the application of the theory and permit its comprehension. This chapter will set the stage for the second chapter.

The second chapter is entitled: "the Pariah's traumatic experience in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*". With the application of the theory, this chapter will explore first the traumatic experiences of the characters in the two books. Then with a comparison between three characters of each novel, much emphasis will be laid on the representation of the pariahs and their social rejection and self estrangement.

Chapter One

Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy*: Text and Context

Introduction

The first chapter of this research work will be devoted to the textual study and socio-historical contexts of the two novels: *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, written by the African American author Toni Morrison. As a Nobel and Pulitzer Prize winner, the author is canonized for her rich body of writings. This chapter will also introduce the theoretical approach of trauma theory to analyze the subject of this dissertation.

Because *Beloved* and *A Mercy* are written by the same writer and tackle the history of slavery, they are similar in many ways. In order to draw out the relationship and thematic connection that link them, it is important to examine first their textual aspects involving: the plot and setting, to analyze their socio-historical context and discuss the two books' common themes.

The study of both content and context is explicitly the engine that drives my research paper and allows a better understanding of this chapter. By the textual study and socio-historical context, I mean to examine and give detailed entries to the plot and the setting of the two novels as well as their historical background in order to reflect the main historical events that inspired Morrison to create these historical fictions. By the end of this chapter, I will present a synopsis of trauma theory introducing the theoretical approach and the definitions of the concept of trauma generally and historical trauma specifically. This chapter will also look at the scope of the theory.

I. The Textual Study of *Beloved* and *A Mercy*

I.1. *Beloved*: Plot Summary and Setting

The narrative in *Beloved* is intricate because it does not follow a chronological order and a flexible setting. Its plot circles from present to past because it is built on the techniques of flashbacks, stream of consciousness and memories.

One of the major settings in *Beloved* is 124 Blue Stone Road because the story both opens and ends in such a place. Moreover, there are other symbolic settings like: the Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky, the prison camp in Georgia, the banks of the Ohio River and also Cherokee village. All of these settings foreshadow the past and memories of the characters.

The story of the novel begins by describing the first setting which is a house, carrying the number 124, situated in Blue Stone Road on the edge of Cincinnati in the year of 1873, eight years after the end of the civil war and eighteen years after Sethe has escaped from slavery. Sethe and her daughter Denver live alone in this house after the death of Baby Suggs, and after Sethe's sons Howard and Buglar escaped the haunted house as it is explained:

124 WAS SPITEFUL. Full of baby's venom. The woman in the house knew it and so did the children. For years, each put up, with the spite in his own way,... the grandmother Baby Suggs, was dead, and the sons, Howard and Buglar, had run away by the time, they were thirteen years old...as soon as merely looking in a mirror chattered it (that was the signal for Buglar); as soon as two tiny hand prints appeared in the cake (that was it for Howard). Neither boy waited to see more; (*Beloved* 3).

Beloved tells the story of a black ex-slave named Sethe who committed infanticide in the past and suffers its consequences in the present. It revolves around Sethe's crime which was her secret trauma. Sethe used to live and work at Sweet Home, a plantation in Kentucky, where she was sold at the age of thirteen and then got married to a slave named Halle with whom she had four children, two sons and two daughters. At Sweet Home, she was the only female slave with six male slaves. All the male slaves there desired her but let her choose her own man since they were "Sweet Home men." (*Beloved* 12)

After eighteen years, Paul D, an ex-slave who used to work with Sethe and her husband Halle at Sweet Home Plantation, arrived at 124 Blue Stone Road unexpectedly. So, Sethe hospitably invited Paul D to stay and he then drove out the ghost that haunted Sethe's house for many years. He expelled the "lonely and rebuked" baby ghost from 124. (16) The solitary daughter Denver is embittered by Paul D's arrival because she feels jealous of her mother's attention to him, and also because he has thrown the spirit with whom she finds company out of the house. Denver and Sethe were previously living alone as outsiders without any contact with their neighborhood, but the presence of Paul D brings some changes to their life, as he aspires to form a family with them and give them hope for a better future.

For eighteen years, Sethe strived to repress her memories but her encounter with Paul D recalled back her memories and past experiences. So, she recalled that before she gave birth to her last child, she had sent ahead her three children to their grand-mother Baby Suggs to Ohio. The latter got her emancipation thanks to her son Halle, who for five years hired himself by doing extra work in other farms at weekends. Sethe was determined to put an end to slavery by escaping the atrocities and horrors she underwent at the plantation with the coming of the cruel schoolteacher. Before she left the plantation, Sethe's breast milk had been stolen by the schoolteacher's nephews. And when she denounced them to her mistress Mrs

Garner, she was savagely whipped and sexually abused by the schoolteacher despite her pregnancy. Despite the bitterness she endured there, Sethe eventually succeeded to join her mother in law and her children by crossing the Ohio River with the assistance of a white woman named Amy Denver.

The white indentured servant Amy cared for Sethe as she was on the verge of giving birth to her fourth child. Amy helped her reach the Ohio River. Sethe had also been helped by a freed slave named Stamp paid who accompanied her to Baby Suggs's house in 124, Blue Stone Road. After twenty eight sweet days of peace and tranquility in Ohio where she had the ability to play her role as a mother and fill her children with maternal love, warmth and tenderness, Sethe's freedom was unfortunately struck by the schoolteacher's quest for her. The schoolteacher came to take her back to slavery with her children through the Fugitive Slave Act. Because of having survived the harsh experiences in slavery, Sethe attempted to avoid such a life to her children rather than seeing them become slaves. Knowing about the schoolteacher's search for her in Ohio, Sethe swiftly took her children to the woodshed and determined to kill them all and then commit suicide. Sethe was caught after she had cut off her two-year old baby girl's throat. She believed she had sent her baby where she would be safe.

Unfortunately Sethe had been ostracized by her community because they did not understand this act of murder. They immediately rejected her and gave her a pariah status. Sethe braved her role as a mother by doing a heroic act of sacrifice to save her baby girl from the vicious atrocities of slavery that she herself survived as a slave. The old lady Baby Suggs was shocked by this horrific scene of murder and mainly by the sight of Sethe suckling her newborn baby as her breast was still wet with the blood of her murdered daughter. As a result, Denver was also considered a victim of the murder because she drank her sister's blood with

her mother's milk. Because of committing such a crime that is considered according to the fugitive slave act as the destruction of slave owner's property, Sethe was put in jail with her baby Denver. After being released from prison, Sethe went to live at Baby Suggs's house at 124 in Ohio. Moreover, Sethe's house became spiteful and haunted by a baby spirit that she believed to be the incarnation of her dead child.

As it has been mentioned before, Paul D arrived at Sethe's house at 124 where he ended up his long journey of eighteen years. Like Sethe, he also recalled his memories and the traumatic incidents he had survived in the past. His journey started with his escape from Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky, to his move to the village of Rochester, then to the prison camp in Georgia where he survived other harsh experiences, being abused and chained, and at last to the spiteful house of 124 in the suburb of Cincinnati.

In 124, *Beloved* comes out and steps into Sethe's house. After returning from the carnival, Paul D, Sethe and her daughter Denver noticed a black girl sitting at the house's porch and claiming her name is *Beloved*, the same name graved on Sethe's murdered baby's gravestone. Moreover, it gradually becomes clear that *Beloved* is the reincarnation of the dead baby who comes back and carries the memories of her own death, of Sethe's past and the suffering of the forgotten masses that were lost in the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

When the strange *Beloved* started to become possessive over Sethe, Denver gathered her courage to save her mother. She overcame her isolation by seeking help from the community. The community responded to Denver's help moving to Sethe's house in order to cast off *Beloved*. These women broke into religious songs, in a kind of exorcism that made *Beloved* disappear as she appeared the first time.

As the story begun in 124, it also ended in the same setting. It ended with the disappearance of Beloved after Sethe was about to repeat the scene of murder she was accused of, eighteen years ago. She tried to attack Mr Bodwin because she had mistaken him for the schoolteacher. The story ends with the return to normal life in 124 ; Denver becomes optimistic about her future life and Paul D comes back to Sethe to take care of her and consider a new life in which “he wants to put his story next to hers” (*Beloved* 273).

I.2. *A Mercy*: Plot Summary and Setting

Like *Beloved*, *A Mercy*'s plot is complex because it is also non-linear, built on flashbacks and memories. Like the plot, the setting is also complex because the story hovers around many settings reflected in the characters' stories.

The novel opens in the present time 1690 in the setting of Virginia as stated by the character of Lina “Florens. It is 1690” (3) It begins with the protagonist Florens, now “a sixteen year old slave girl”, who is in the talking room in Jacob's house, addressing her story to her beloved, the handsome blacksmith, saying “If so, come to this farm again, part the snakes in the gate you made, enter this big, awing house, climb the stairs and come inside this talking room in daylight.” (288) At the beginning, we hear the voice of Florens who narrates her journey to the blacksmith, carrying a message from her mistress who is sick, soon after Jacob's death. Florens says “let me start with what I know for certain” (2), asking why her mother has given her up and that the only thing she understands is her mother's abandonment not her sacrifice; she says “other signs need more time to understand” (2) , then we learn of other characters' stories narrated by the third person narrator.

A Mercy is a journey that takes the reader into the emotions and thoughts of the characters through flashbacks, stream of consciousness and memories. Like *Beloved*, in *A Mercy*, we also come to know about other characters' stories and lives through flashbacks.

The story opens with Florens talking to the blacksmith about her experiences as a black slave in wild America, saying "Don't be afraid. My telling can't hurt you in spite of what I have done and I promise to lie quietly in the dark" (1) She addresses her lover, the blacksmith, as if she is with him: "you can think what I tell you a confession" (1) She also tells him about her journey in the wilderness to look for him.

Through Florens' flashbacks, the story's setting goes back to Maryland, to the Southern Portuguese plantation owned by the D'Ortega, where she used to live as a slave with her mother and her little brother, before her journey to Vaark's farm. Florens states "Lina says the place of my talking on stone is Mary's Land where sir does business. So that is where my mother and her baby boy are buried. Or will be if they ever decide to rest" (7)

She narrates about her life in this tobacco plantation under the cruelty of the D'ortega's family who spent four years in the African colony of Angola. Florens recalls her life there spending her days "picking okra and sweeping tobacco sheds", her "nights on the floor of the cookhouse" with her minha mae (5).

The story shifts then to Jacob Vaark's journey into a plantation called "Jublio" to collect his debts from D'Ortega.(20) Mr D'Ortega fell on hard times after losing his ship with all his slaves. His "ship had been anchored a nautical mile from shore" and "a third of his cargo had died of ship fever" (24) He admitted that he could pay his debt but rather offered one of his slaves as partial payment. The first pages of the novel take the readers into Florens' memories, how she fell at the age of seven in the hands of Jacob Vaark as part payment for

Senhor's debts. Despite the fact that "flesh was not his commodity" (34), Jacob Vaark felt repulsed to take Florens at the pleading of her slave mother. As it is explained: "Me watching, my mother listening, her baby boy on her hip. Senhor is not paying the whole amount he owes to Sir. Sir saying he will take instead the woman and the girl, not the baby boy and the debt is gone. A menha mae begs no. her baby is still at her breast. Take the girl, she says, my daughter, she says. Me. Me. Sir agrees and changes the balance due." (8)

Therefore, Florens was taken by Jacob Vaark out of mercy. Her mother told her "it was not a miracle-It was a mercy"(297) it was the thing that Florens could not understand before. It is difficult indeed for a little girl of seven years like Florens to grasp her mother's act of mercy.

The setting shifts then to Virginia; Florens made a long journey with the kind-hearted Reverend Father who took her to Vaark's farm. At his farm, she saw for the first time Lina, Sorrow, Jacob's wife and two boys, Will and Scully. Florens was welcomed solely by Lina, "then Lina", she notes "smiles when she looks at me and wraps me for warmth" (10)

The D'Ortega's plantation was as a sepulcher to Florens, unlike Jacob's farm .It was a refuge to Florens and to the other women living there, and despite the fact that they are slaves at Jacob's farm, they are humanly treated and live like sisters under the protection of Jacob. They were like birds in a nest sheltered by Jacob's wings. It was not only Florens who was at the mercy of Jacob Vaark but other strays too, like: Lina who is a Native American whose tribe has been destroyed by small pox and Sorrow who survived shipwreck during a sea voyage.

Florens's thoughts are recorded in a stream of consciousness and her story is told in each chapter from different points of view because each chapter tells about other characters'

stories. Florens' flashback into Jacob's farm tells how Jacob Vaark, the owner of the farm, had taken in the members of his household including his wife Rebekka, who was brought to the New World as a mail order bride by her father. Through Rebekka's stream of consciousness, the setting shifts to the Middle Passage. In this setting, the reader becomes acquainted with the other characters who survived the middle passage with Rebekka. Then it goes to the servant Lina who filled Florens with love and tenderness and who worried about her journey to the wilderness. Thereafter, the story moves to tell about Sorrow who survived the shipwreck and whose memories were lost and forgotten. These characters take turns in narrating their stories and their voices carry the physical and psychological trauma in their lives.

At the end, the setting moves back again to Maryland, to Barbados, exactly in D'Ortega's plantation where Florens and her mother were enslaved as it has been mentioned above. Minha mae describes the place "Barbados I hear them say" and "so to Barbados where I found relief in the clean air and standing up straight under a sky the color of home"(294)

The story ends with Florens's mother telling why she gave her daughter up and offered her to the trader Jacob Vaark. She explains to Florens "because I saw the tall man see you as a human child, not pieces of eight" (297) In the last chapter, Minha mae addresses her daughter "Oh Florens. My love. Hear a tua mae", explaining to her that the act she did out of her maternal love was aiming to protect her from the eyes and lust of Senhor and his sons. She claims that: "Breasts provide pleasure more than simpler things. Yours are rising too soon and are becoming too irritated by the cloth covering your little girl chest. And they see and I see them see." (289)

I.3. Common Themes in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*

Beloved and *A Mercy* are similar in many ways. They are considered to be companion pieces because comparisons between them are undoubtedly inevitable. They are not only written by the same Laureate who is Toni Morrison and evoke the history of slavery but they also tackle some major common themes. To highlight this thematic connection, I will bring to light these common themes.

I.3.1. The Theme of Slavery

The first prominent theme evoked within *Beloved* and *A Mercy* is slavery. Slavery was a long bleak history of horror and dehumanization in which the slaves were tortured physically and psychologically and suffered at the hands of their slave owners. In these books, Morrison reveals the historic trauma of slavery and its aftermath through the characters' traumatic past experiences.

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison dedicated her epigraph to the "Sixty Million and more", to those victims who died in the Middle Passage before reaching the New World. In *Beloved*, she gives us full references to slavery through flashbacks and the characters' memories. With every character's own story, we learn about the history of slavery. Through Sethe's journey into her past, we learn that she was sold as a slave to Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky at the age of thirteen and barely knew her mother. Sethe used to live in a southern plantation with her mother and Nan who nursed her with other slave babies. Like Sethe, slaves knew a little bit about their childhood because they were separated from their families at an early age to be sold like commodities to different farms, because in slavery this was the norm. The slaves were not only considered as commodities but they were also treated like animals. At the hands of the schoolteacher, the slaves Sethe, Halle, Paul D and others were shown their

"animalistic features"(85). For instance, Sethe was held down and her milk was stolen by the white men as if she was a cow. She says "those boys came in there and took my milk" (19). While "an iron bit" was put in Paul D's mouth like an animal, in addition to Sixo and Paul F who were burned to death (82)

Despite their emancipation, the slaves could not escape the effects of slavery because they are traumatic and carry psychological and physical wounds hard to heal and forget. In the case of *Beloved*'s characters, all of them had wounds caused by slavery. For example, the "chokecherry tree" on Sethe's back reminds her of the awful slavery (18) Her back was like a painting on which a leafy tree was drawn by the schoolteacher's whips. Like all the slaves, Sethe has been whipped savagely, she says "the schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree" (20). Through her scars, Toni Morrison depicts the horrors of slavery. Moreover, for Sethe, what is also associated with slavery was her infanticide. When she was caught by the schoolteacher, Sethe killed her baby daughter to save her from slavery and its tragedy. Another example that illustrates slavery in *Beloved* is the trauma of rape. Sexual abuse was known to be a common practice in slavery. Slaves, mainly women, were subject to sexual assaults as was the case with Sethe, her mother and Nan who " were taken up many times by the crew" (74), Baby Suggs whose "eight children had six fathers" (28) ,in addition to Ella and Stamp Paid's wife. They all experienced rape at the hands of the white men. In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison highlights the atrocities and the traumatic experiences of slavery that the characters of Sethe and Paul D strived to repress and forget.

In *A Mercy*, Toni Morrison portrays and reveals 17th century slavery through the characters' traumatic experiences and memories. Similarly to *Beloved*, in *A Mercy* Toni Morrison gives voice to slaves silenced by the trauma of slavery through the storytelling of Florens. It tells the history of slavery in colonial America from the perspective of the

characters; the majority of them are slaves that confess their experiences in slavery. There is the voice of the slave girl Florens who has been taken as partial payment to Jacob's farm, then the voice of the Native American Lina, whose tribe was destroyed by smallpox and was taken by Jacob to serve as a slave in his farm; there is also the voice of Sorrow, a strange girl who has spent her early years at sea and after shipwreck she was taken by Jacob as a slave; and finally there is the devastating voice of Florens' mother, who is brought from Angola to be a slave at the Portuguese D'Ortega's plantation. Through Florens' storytelling, we learn about the history of slavery and the painful wounds the slaves had undergone. In *A Mercy*, slaves are divided into slaves and indentured servants. The slaves are like objects, bought and sold as Lina, Sorrow, Florens and her Minha Mae; whereas the indentured servants are committed to work for a certain period in exchange for a piece of land which usually entail them a passage to America. On the Vaark farm, Willard and Scully were the servants.

Every character's experience reflects the trauma of slavery. For instance Florens was enslaved along with her mother at the D'Ortega's plantation where she spends "nights on the floor of the cookhouse with a minha mae" (5). Florens' mother was brought as other slaves from Africa across the Middle Passage, she states "so it was as a black that I was purchased by Senhor, taken out of the cane and shipped north to his tobacco plants" (295) As it was the custom in slavery, slaves were not allowed to be educated because education may question their freedom. Because they are slaves, Florens and her mother are deprived of being educated and baptized. The kind-hearted Reverend Father "is forbidden to do this but he teaches" them. Florens and her mother "once every seven days" learn "to read and write" (6)

To not experience the trauma of slavery again, Florens' mother offers Florens to Jacob Vaark, telling Florens that "to be a female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal" (291). Under slavery, women were subject to the trauma of rape, it was from this

horrific nightmare that Minha Mae attempted to protect her daughter saying "there was no protection" (290). The fact that Florens grows up into a young lady she starts "to catch Senhor's eyes". Because of slavery, she was sold off to Jacob's farm where she served as a slave with other girls like Sorrow and Lina.

I.3.2. The Theme of Motherhood

The second common theme within *Beloved* and *A Mercy* is motherhood. The themes of motherhood and slavery are interrelated because motherhood is confined by the institution of slavery. Toni Morrison represents the theme of motherhood through the tragic rough choices that slave mothers were compelled to make, under the harsh circumstances of slave life. Both the slave mothers in *Beloved* and *A Mercy* braved their role as fearless mothers so as to rescue the life of their daughters from the ghost and horrors of slavery. Both of their harsh actions came out of their blind love and self devotion as mothers.

In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison represented the theme of motherhood through the characters of mothers and daughters. As explained by Paula Gallant Eckard : "In telling the story of Sethe, Denver, Baby Suggs, and Beloved, Morrison reveals the horrific and wrenching impact of slavery on motherhood, but in the process she creates a new and mythic model of maternity built on generations of female experience" (2). In addition, motherhood is shown through the tragic incident of Sethe's infanticide. It is the turning point in this novel that shows how a slave mother under the horrific slavery exposed herself to danger for protecting her children. Sethe's infanticide can be seen as a rough act of a heartless mother but in fact, a mother can do everything that her profound instinct dictates her; in order to shield her children with her warm wings. Even if murder may be a last resort, she would not hesitate to do so.

In *Beloved*, we as readers become aware that mothers were prevented from exercising their natural role as mothers because of slavery. As it was the custom in slavery, children were separated from their mothers at the cradle and used to be nursed by nuns because their mothers left for the fields earlier. This was the case of Sethe's mother and Sethe. Through flashbacks, we learn that Sethe was sold to Sweet Home at the age of thirteen and barely remembers her mother. All she remembers of her was the physical mark on her ear "right on her rib was a circle and a cross, burnt right in the skin" (72). Sethe had been separated from her mother as a new born baby and had not been breastfed by her, "she must of nursed me two or three weeks" Sethe reflected, "then she went back in rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was" (72). Paula Gallant Eckard notes that "Sethe was nursed by another woman and raised by Nan, who gave Sethe not only nurturance, but provided links to the maternal history of her past as well"(2).

As a baby, she lacks mother's love, tenderness and warmth and unfortunately she grows up likewise. Like a mother, Sethe has also been separated from her two –year old baby whom she sent to her grand-mother Baby Suggs. She was tortured by the fact that her breasts were full but could not nurse her baby, as she exclaimed "then they know what is like to send your children off when your breasts are full" (19).

Another slave woman who has been hindered from acting her role as a mother was the slave Baby Suggs. She gave birth to "eight children", "four taken", "four chased" except for "Halle" whom she was able to keep the longest"(28) Slavery robbed her of her children and she can't remember them. She says "My first –born. All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread" (28). She had eight children and that's all she remembers. In slavery, slave women gave birth to children but were not allowed to manifest their natural

maternal instinct. This separation of mothers-children is explained by the African American slave Frederick Douglass in his narrative "*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave*":

"Frequently, before the child has reached its twelfth month, its mother is taken from it, and hired out on some farm a considerable distance off, and the child is placed under the care of an old woman, too old for the field labor. For what this separation is done, I don't know, unless it be to hinder the development of the child's affection toward its mother, and to blunt and destroy the natural affection of the mother of the child. This is the inevitable result." (2)

Under slavery, slave mothers suffered emotionally at the hands of the heartless white men. They were treated less than humans and worse than animals.

The theme of motherhood is portrayed in *A Mercy* through the female characters that are mothers and daughters like: Florens' mother, Rebekka, Sorrow, Lina and Florens. All of them have in common motherlessness. They suffer from the loss of mother and children and had troubling experiences. As in *Beloved*, in *A Mercy*, Toni Morrison also shows another example of a mother's hard choice, love and sacrifice, not in the form of infanticide, but this time in the form of proposal.

Florens' mother was the best character that exemplifies this deep maternal self devotion for her daughter. As all slave mothers, she was deprived of her maternity and prevented from keeping her daughter with her. She lost her daughter under the harsh circumstances of slave life. She strived to put her emotions aside when she pleaded Jacob Vaark to take her daughter Florens. It is indeed difficult to be at once a mother and a slave;

this was the case of Minha Mae who made a rough choice concerning the life of her infant. It is indeed painful and hard for a mother to be separated from her child and give it up, but the harshness of life leaves no choice. However, since Florens' mother saw "there was no animal" in Jacob's heart (291), she did not fail to grasp this opportunity for the purpose of saving her daughter from the tragic fate of slavery. She tells Jacob "take the girl, my daughter" (8). She begs him to take Florens for the sake of saving her, saying "Please, Senhor. Not me. Take her. Take my daughter" (42). This action may be thoughtless and insensitive as Sethe's infanticide in *Beloved*, but in fact it is all out of a mother's profound love and anxiety. No one may give up his life to make such a great sacrifice as a mother. She is the mere, tender person who cares and worries for her children more than anyone else. *A Mercy* gives a perspective on motherhood through the relationship between mother and daughter. That is to say that Florens' mother hoped a new life for her daughter in offering her to Jacob Vaark, but this heroic act of love was perceived by Florens as rejection and hatred.

Moreover, another example of motherhood is illustrated in Lina's relationship with Florens. Lina who is a Native American slave at Jacob's farm served as a foster mother to Florens; because she lost her mother she aspired to fill this emotional gap and "hunger for mother" with Florens. The mother that Florens was deprived of was substituted by Lina. The first time Florens arrived at Jacob's farm, she was welcomed warmly by Lina, as she states "Then Lina smiles when she looks at me and wraps me for warmth" (10)

The theme of motherhood is also depicted through the character of Rebekka, who was not a slave but struggled with her fate as a mother. She suffered from the loss of her children whom she lost at birth. The harsh and bitter life in the wild Americas robbed her of her children. As it is explained: "Three dead infants in a row, followed by the accidental death of Patrician, their five-year-old, had unleavened her". (32) She gave birth to many children but

to her unfortunate life, she lost them because death split them apart. Motherhood is also portrayed through the character of Sorrow who gave birth to her infant out of rape. She struggled in her life because she had gone through a traumatic experience of shipwreck that affected her psychologically. Her role as a mother fosters her and heals her of her painful wounds because her infant gives sense to her life and makes her feel "complete". She said "I am your mother. My name is complete" (245) She is "prompted by the legitimacy of her new status as a mother" (244)

Beloved and *A Mercy* show how slavery had violated the sacredness of maternity and motherhood in many ways. Motherhood is linked to the idea of glory because both slave mothers, Sethe and Florens 'mother, have done heroic acts to shelter their daughters from slavery. It compelled them to do the unbelievable and unimaginable for the sole protection of their children. The ghost of slavery left mothers' hearts empty of their children's warmth.

II. The Socio-Historical Context of *Beloved* and *A Mercy*

II.1. Toni Morrison's Biography

The African American author known publically by her pen name *Toni Morrison* was born *Chloe Anthony Wofford*, on February 18th, 1931 in Loraine, Ohio. She was grown up during the Great Depression, in a poor family that migrated to the north in search of justice and escape of racism.

As an African-American in a town of immigrants, she grew up with the notion that the only place she could turn to for aid and reassurance would be within her own community. She emanated from a lively household in which the common practice was storytelling; her family

used to tell folktales and stories to each other. As cited in *Bloom's Guides : Toni Morrison's Beloved*, "The Woffords taught their children to appreciate black literary culture by singing and reading African folklore to them at an early age" (9). Her family was the first source for her inspiration that triggered her passion and avidity for reading ghost stories and folktales. The seeds for her future career were sown by her family members, among them her grandfather who is an avid storyteller and her mother who is a gifted singer.

Morrison's school career knew success and brilliance. She was able to read before she attended school and she was the only African-American in her first grade class at the elementary school. As an adolescent, Morrison became aware of the racial divisions in the American society. "When I was in first grade", she later told a reporter from *The New York Times* "nobody thought I was inferior. I was the only black in the class and the only child who could read," (Toni Morrison Biography). In her teen age, she became enthralled by classic literature, including Jane Austen, Fyodor Dostoevsky, and Leo Tolstoy; and she used to work in a library where she spent her spare time reading the classics. In an interview with Jean Strouse, Morrison told her childhood experiences with literature, "Those books were not written for a little black girl in Lorain, Ohio, but they were so magnificently done that I got them anyway -- they spoke directly to me out of their own specificity." (Stephanie Li, 7)

When Toni Morrison attended different universities, she excelled in her high studies and completed her master's thesis with brilliance on the works of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner by whom she was highly influenced. She worked as a teacher of English at different universities and then moved to work as a textbook editor, she played a vital role in bringing black literature into the mainstream by editing books by prominent black authors like Henry Dumas, Angela Davis and Gayl Jones. Toni Morrison is a multiple award winning author who is specialized in Black fiction and whose professional career as a teacher, editor, critic and

novelist is shaped by achievements. She has given new life to American Literature of the second half of 20th century in general and African American Literature in particular.

Morrison began writing as part of an informal group of writers and poets that she met at the university. She wrote a short story that revolved around a black girl who wished to have blue eyes. She expanded this story into her first novel, '*The Bluest Eye*' in 1970. The critical reviews she got for her beginning inspired her to write more. *The Bluest Eye* marked Morrison's beginning as an author and built her place in world literature as a young gifted African American novelist. She wrote this story because it was the kind of story she read with eagerness. Toni Morrison once said: "If there is a book that you want to read but it has not been written yet, then you must write it"(good reads, Toni Morrison quote)

She wrote for her people and her community; while giving a lecture at Princeton, Morrison was asked by a student "who she wrote for." She replied, "I want to write for people like me, which is to say black people, curious people, and demanding people—people who can't be faked, people who don't need to be patronized, people who have very, very high criteria." (*Bloom's GUIDES: Toni Morrison's Beloved*, 10)

Morrison used most of her works as an expression of her concern with the themes of community, identity, injustice, oppression, trauma and marginalization. She created a style of writing that is characterized by epic themes, descriptive dialogues and rich depictions of black American culture and community and detailed analysis of the African American characters.

In her first four novels, *The Bluest Eye* 1970, *Sula* 1973, *Song of Solomon* 1977 and *Tar Baby* 1981, Morrison put the theme of identity and Black community at the center of the narratives; she was concerned with tackling the issues of gender, class and race and she also explored mainly the black female experience.

In her fifth novel published in 1987 entitled *Beloved*, Morrison continued exploring the same previous themes that gave her works special features. *Beloved* was considered her magnum opus. Two years after its publication, Morrison was appointed Robert Goheen Chair in the Council of Humanities at Princeton University and awarded the Modern Language Association of American Commonwealth Award in Literature. After the publication of *Beloved*, it received almost universal praise and was awarded the Pulitzer Prize and it received also many other different awards.

In 1993, Toni Morrison was the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. This consecration shaped her notoriety in world literature. However, Morrison was already known by the time the novel was published, but this book took her reputation to the top. In 2006, the New York Times Book Review named *Beloved* the best American novel of the past twenty-five years. *Beloved* was about love and the supernatural, but Morrison still evoked the themes of community, trauma, rejection and loss of identity in it. It revolved around the plight of a slave woman named Sethe who committed infanticide and braved her role as a mother by doing a heroic act of sacrifice under the harsh circumstances of life.

Eighteen years later, the murdered baby ghost was reincarnated in human flesh and came to haunt Sethe and the whole community.

Jazz, *Paradise*, *Love* and *Home* are also Morrison's works. As usual, she puts the African American characters at the center of her stories. In 2008, Morrison wrote her ninth novel entitled *A Mercy*. It was one of her most influential works. The New York Times selected *A Mercy* as one of the ten best books of the year. In 2010, it was chosen for one book, one Chicago program. Morrison went back to the period of slavery and to the early years of racism in her novel *A Mercy*. *A Mercy* reveals what lies beneath the surface of slavery in early America. It also discusses the themes of slavery, community, rejection and

trauma. Once again, a woman who was both a slave and a mother must make a terrible choice regarding her child. As in *Beloved*, Morrison shows motherly love, another mother's heroic act of sacrifice to save her daughter from the trauma of slavery. This was Floren's mother who had given her daughter to a trader named Jacob Vaark as part payment for her master's debt; and Jacob took her out of a mercy. Like in her other novels, in *Beloved* and *A Mercy* Morrison put the peripheral figures mainly females at the center of the story to denounce the black female experience and the blacks' predicament and feeling of estrangement in the white society. Each of her works provides insights into the complexity of the black community. The general shared focus in her fictional narratives is the sociopolitical struggle that has historically characterized the African-American experience.

Toni Morrison continues to write to this day, and her last novel is *God Help the Child*, published in 2015. This work revolves around the theme of rejection as in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*; the three female black protagonists are rejected by their parents.

Toni Morrison did not only write novels but also essays and librettos. She published her essay *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* in 1992. Most of her essays and speeches were collected in *What Moves at the Margin: selected Nonfiction* published in 2008.

II.2. *Beloved*'s and *A Mercy*'s Historical Contexts

Though they seem real stories borrowed from the archive of American history, Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy* are historic fictions, as stated by G. Hendersen: "like several of her contemporaries, Morrison seeks to achieve these ends in a novel that both historicizes fiction and fictionalizes history" (82). Through their fictitious characters they reflect real historical events and those victims silenced through the painful history. *Beloved* reflects the

American Southern society before, during and after the American civil war, while *A Mercy* tells about colonial America, known during 1680's as the New World. Both *Beloved* and *A Mercy* tell about the painful American history of slavery. Morrison wrote these fictions from a historical perspective in order to remember and heal the past of her people, and "to recuperate a history that had been lost to the ravages of forced silences and willed forgetfulness." because the African Americans were ashamed of their past (*Beloved's* context, Sparknotes) Moreover, she wrote these fictions to give voice to the characters' pain under slavery and the most inhumane conditions during the Middle Passage.

Beloved takes us back to the history of slavery to the 1850's, before the American Civil War. It gives references to the American historical facts. This story takes place during the Post- Civil War Era, a period known as the Reconstruction Era, from 1870 to 1890. It begins in 1873, almost a decade after the end of the devastating American Civil War that lasted four years. The novel's narrative hovers between 1855 and 1873 through the use of flashbacks; Toni Morrison aimed at inserting the novel within the historical context of American slavery. *Beloved* is related to events surrounding the Civil War, especially the Fugitive Slave Act, which allowed southern slave owners to travel north and reclaim any slaves that had escaped from their masters.

As it has been mentioned before, the narrative goes back to the 1850's when the character of Sethe Garner escaped from Kentucky to Ohio but was unfortunately caught by the schoolteacher under the legal Fugitive Slave Act. At that time, the American Congress had passed this law which gave the slave owners the right to pursue their slaves to the north and recapture them.

Beloved is full of references to slavery. For example, In Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky Sethe, Halle, Baby Suggs, Paul D and others used to be slaves to their master Mr

Garner and then to the cruel schoolteacher. Slaves were beaten, whipped and tortured like beasts. Slavery is also referred to through the act of infanticide that Sethe had committed to save her children from slavery, the same act committed by the factual runaway slave Margaret Garner in 1851. Many events in the story have given full insights into the bitter history of slavery. For instance, the physical scars on Sethe's back and her mammary rape, the iron bit in Paul D's mouth, the burning of Paul A and Sixo and the insanity of Halle due to his wife's rape, all show the psychological and physical trauma of slavery.

Beloved is also related to events surrounding the Middle Passage. From the epigraph, we learn that Morrison dedicated her novel to the "sixty million and more", to those victims who endured the horrendous Middle voyage and did not live to reach the American shores. "The Middle Passage refers to the second part of the journey undertaken by slaves, captains, and crews that slaves from the coast of Africa to the Americas." (*Encyclopedia of the Middle Passage*, 16) It was the cause of the miseries of the slaves where they became victims of both physical and psychological violence and brutality.

In *Beloved*, the Middle Passage is also referred to through Sethe's and Beloved's flashbacks and stream of consciousness. The bleak horrific voyage to the Americas was reflected in the story when Sethe recalled that "her mother and Nan were together from the sea". (*Beloved* 74) Slaves in the Middle Passage were chained like animals stayed in cold, squalor and darkness. In the story, The Middle Passage is depicted by Beloved when telling Denver that where she came from was "dark", "hot and nothing to breath down there and no room to move in" and that there was "a lot of people down there" and "some is dead" (*Beloved* 88). Slaves were cruelly treated by the crewmen. To escape this vicious brutality, most of them committed suicide. "Sexual assault and rape were thought to have been common experiences for female slaves during the Middle Passage". (*Encyclopedia of the Middle*

Passage, 24) Women and children were kept above deck and were abused by the crew, as it was the case with Sethe's mother and Nan, who "were taken many times by the crew" during their passage. (*Beloved* 74)

The inspiration behind writing *Beloved* was the factual horrifying story of Margaret Garner that Morrison discovered when editing *The Black Book*. While reading this book, she came across a newspaper item dating back to the period of slavery entitled *The murder of a fugitive slave named Margaret Garnerto her child in 1851*. Morrison was personally touched by this tragic incident that she thought to convert it into a novel. Intentionally, she did not make further research about this real incident because she wanted to write a story imbued with her own imagination. For the author, Garner's story epitomized one of the chief horrors of slavery: the separation of families and the destruction of the bond between parent and child.

As it has been said before, the story of Margaret Garner was an inspiration for the author but the novel that "she wrote, *Beloved*, is more than a replication of the Margaret Garner story" (*Critical Companion to Toni Morrison*, 21). Critic Claudine Reynaud wrote in her essay entitled "*Beloved or the shifting shapes of memory*" that when first writing the book, Morrison was obsessed with fragments of stories about two different incidents: a child-murder by an ex-slave and the forgiveness of a young lover who helped her murderer escape the police". (*The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison*, 60)

In the newspaper article Margaret Garner was the woman who committed infanticide when she was caught by her master. She was a slave who used to work in a farm in Kentucky with her husband and her mother Cilla. With the coming of a new master, who was extremely cruel, their life was threatened. After they fled to Ohio and their hiding place was discovered, Margaret swore she would kill her children rather than see them again reduced to slavery. Her

daughter's throat "was cut from ear to ear" with a knife (Samuel J May, 26). After killing her daughter, Margaret was about to kill her other children and herself. She was caught "holding a knife in her hand" and she was just over the heads of her two little children"(26). Eventually, she was charged for trail because she was accused of destruction of property and was sent back into slavery along with her husband.

As in *Beloved*, Toni Morrison also evoked the history of slavery and the Middle Passage in *A Mercy*. Even though twenty one years passed between the two books' publication, the author made references to the similar historical facts in America, but much earlier. *A Mercy* revolved around the era when slave trade was still at its infancy and slavery was not yet legalized as a rigid peculiar institution. Slavery is referred to in this novel through the slave characters of Florens and her *minha mae* and also through the servants Lina, Sorrow, Willy and Scully who worked at Jacob's farm. At the Portuguese plantation of D'Ortega, Florens and her mother live under the cruelty of the stone -hearted Senhor where they spend their "nights on the cookhouse floor"(7). All the slaves, mainly women had survived the horrific sexual assaults at the hands of their masters. In *A Mercy* it was the case of Florens's mother who has been raped many times. This is shown in the last pages of the novel when *Minha Mãe* addressed her daughter Florens saying "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" (291). Rape is also referenced in her saying "to be a female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal" (291)

The story is set in the 17th century around 1680's when the thirteen British colonies were already established in America. At that time, the New World was divided between different races: Africans, Europeans and Native Americans .The 1680's were marked by a mass expansion of slavery in the colonies, the latter depended on slavery as forced labor to

work the tremendous plantations, mainly those of tobacco. The cultivation of tobacco was mainly the most established in Chesapeake in the southern colonies of Virginia and Maryland. Tobacco was the basis of the European trade markets at that time, as it is mentioned in the novel "the Province of Maryland allowed trade to foreign markets" (19). This is referenced in the novel through the tobacco plantation of the Portuguese D'Ortega, as expressed by Florens "I spend my days picking okra and sweeping tobacco sheds" (5). Another reference to tobacco is reflected in the novel when the trader Jacob Vaark arrived at the D'ortega's plantation smelling "the tobacco odor" (26)

Since Toni Morrison depicts early colonial America in her novel *A Mercy*, she gives full insights into the events that shaped life in 17th century America. Life in the New World was ruthless and harsh due to the spread of the dreadful diseases of small pox, plague, malaria and typhoid mainly in the southern colonies of Virginia and Maryland, brought by the white indentured servants from England and the African slaves. Those diseases were referred to in the novel through Rebbeka's and Sorrow's illness, Jacob Vaark's death and the destruction of Lina's tribe by small pox. *A Mercy* is also full of references to the history of slavery. In 17th America, slavery was a form of forced labor on which the European economy was based. Most of the slaves were brought during this era to undertake hand labor. Most of those slaves who reached North America came from the West coast of Africa, including the colony of Angola. As it was the case with Florens' mother, she was brought on board the ship by the Portuguese D'Ortega's family who spent "four years in Angola (28)

In 17th century America, some colonies forbade teaching slaves and baptizing them, because even conversion to Christianity could give a slave freedom. This is referred to in the novel in the first pages in which Florens reveals that she and her mother were taught secretly by the Reverend Father. As it is explained:

"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 catch him he will be in prison or pay money or both" (6)

In the 17th century, the Atlantic slave trade was still at its beginning and what gave birth to the slave trade was the Portuguese who settled trade relations along the coast of West Africa. The Portuguese slave trade is referred to in this novel by the Portuguese plantation owner D'Ortega, who had gone to Angola, "Portugal's slave pool", and spent "four years" to manage shipment to Brazil" and who brought slaves to Maryland, among them Florens' mother (28)

In *A Mercy*, the Middle Passage is referred to through the characters' flashbacks and stream of consciousness, through Rebekka and Sorrow who survived a long sea voyage and also through Florens' mother who was brought to the New World as a slave. In the 1680's many indentured servants from England crossed the Atlantic Ocean to the New World to escape the dreadful misery and conditions in England, and also to flee the harsh religious intolerance. This was the case of Rebekka who had been sent by her father to be Jacob's bride, who in her sea journey met some women who threw themselves to an unknown world as servants, and whose costs for the passage "be borne by years and years of unpaid labor" (151)

The African slaves were kidnapped to be traded to the New World as it happened with Florens's mother. She tells Florens that the white men "bound with vine one to another" and then "divided we and placed we in canoes"(292) During the Middle Passage, the slaves

endured the most dreadful experiences on board the ship. As it is stated by Florens' mother, "some of we jumped" and others starved themselves "refusing to eat the oiled yam", because they saw death less worse than slavery. She says "each water, river or sea has sharks under" in order to prevent the slaves from jumping over the board. (292) She also says "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" (293)

III. An Overview of Trauma Theory

Beloved and *A Mercy*, written by the inspiring African American Laureate Toni Morrison, are two historic fictions that tackle the black historical trauma of slavery. They are not only linked by major typical themes but they also have so many similar characters that fall prey to slavery. They are books that highlight the wounds inflicted both physically and psychologically upon the different characters due to the historical and cultural trauma of slavery. For this reason, trauma theory is chosen as a major reference in order to discuss and analyze the traumatic experiences of the characters, and demonstrate how they become pariahs due to their traumas.

I intend to apply trauma theory as it is formulated by the key figures of trauma studies like Cathy Caruth, Jefferey .C Alexander, Michelle Balaev, Judith Herman and Ron Eyerman. Each one of them studied trauma theory from different perspectives: psychological, historical, social or cultural. They have established the relevance of trauma theory to humanities through their different adaptations to suit cultural and literary studies. This is done in order to research the theoretical elements and definitions of the main concepts of their theories that could contribute to this research work.

To start, trauma theory is defined as an area and a field of cultural investigation that emerged in the early 1990's, affecting humanities. It originates from the domain of psychoanalysis and psychiatry. Its objective is the study of literary and cultural texts to give new significance to the real world. It is a contemporary literary and psychological field which claims that trauma causes speechlessness and panic; and this leads to the destruction of identity.

Trauma is adopted as a theory by scholars, psychologists and literary critics, among them the key figure Cathy Caruth. She states in her influential book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* that "trauma theory is one of the areas today in which this survival is precisely taking place, not only in the assured-ness of its transformation and appropriation by psychiatry but in the creative uncertainties of this theory that remain, for psychiatry and psychoanalysis, in the enigma of trauma as both destruction and survival, an enigma that lies at the very heart of the Freudian insight itself" (59)

Trauma theory offers a wide framework for understanding the effects of horrendous events experienced in life such as violence, rape, abandonment and their repercussions on the human relationships and development. This theory helps the trauma survivors expose the extreme effects of trauma and anxiety and understand the importance of knowing these effects. People get traumatized when they encounter overwhelming and frightening events in their life and get harmed by someone not necessarily something. The theoretical approach of trauma attempts to reveal and demonstrate their emotional pain and know the symptoms that are present after the experience of trauma. It offers a significant support for the psychologists and researchers to investigate the symptoms and effects of trauma and help the survivors become aware of their experiences.

As it is formulated by Cathy Caruth, "trauma theory often divides itself into two basic trends: the focus on trauma as the shattering of previously whole self and the focus on the survival function of trauma as allowing one to get through an overwhelming experience by numbering oneself to it" (102)

The wide contemporary field of literary trauma theory studies the significance of trauma and the effects of this latter on the individual's psyche. It investigates the factors that caused the disruption of one's psyche in a traumatic experience. It studies the relationship between language, behavior and psyche. Michelle Balaev states that "trauma causes a disruption and reorientation of consciousness, but the values attached to this experience are influenced by a variety of individual and cultural factors that change overtime" (4). Thus, the external factors are the central causes that create traumatism and trauma results in the absence and disruption of consciousness. To sum up, trauma theory had been successfully applied by literary critics, scholars and psychoanalysts who adopted and adapted it to analyze and interpret literary texts.

This theoretical approach is an ethical program because it influences humans' principles and morals. It is displayed in the highly influential works of Cathy Caruth around the 1990's. We cannot speak about trauma without making reference to the trauma theorist Cathy Caruth. The latter is known to have marked the beginning and development of trauma theory. She based her studies on interpreting and analyzing psychoanalytical texts using trauma theory. She is one of the prominent figures that paved the way to the emergence of this field of study along with other critics and scholars like: Shoshana Felman, Dorilaub, Geoffrey Hartman and Dominick Lacapra. These scholars are all considered the founding figures of trauma theory. They contributed in one way or another to the extension of this field of study.

Through *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* written in 1996, Cathy Caruth initiated the theoretical approach of trauma. She was the first to apply and adopt a psychoanalytic post-structural approach to trauma. In this book which makes connection between the notion of trauma and history, Caruth aimed at explaining that history is traumatic and that trauma is an overwhelming experience that rejects expression. She studied trauma through a psychoanalytic perspective by making reference to the works of the psychoanalysts Lacan and Freud. In her book, she represents texts that bear witness to traumatic history to show that history can be traumatic and how extreme events can resist our understanding.

Through reading Cathy Caruth's book, we comprehend that traumatic experience imposes isolation on the individuals and their cultures. Unlike history which is a collective trauma, trauma as a notion is the individual's own extreme experience. But considering the trauma of one individual can lead to the trauma of the whole community, Caruth confirms that "one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another" (14). The reason for this is that it will become the matter of the community in attempting to bring solidarity.

Cathy Caruth says that it is not the traumatic experience itself that produces traumatic effects but rather "the remembrance" of it. She intends to show that it is not the event itself that creates trauma but when thinking about it continually, one may be traumatized. According to her, trauma is a reflective process because it comes in the form of imagination and memory. For Caruth, when a traumatic event occurs in the past, it repeats itself in the present, as if it is occurring in the present time, because the victim recalls back the event in nightmare and memory. Furthermore, she intends to say that trauma is a consequence of an event which is repeated and unexpected in the consciousness by nightmares. The survivor is possessed by the past and continues to be so in the present because the effects of trauma do not appear at the time of the event's occurrence.

Besides Caruth's analysis and explanation of how the reliving of trauma is the most traumatizing than the traumatic event itself, the critic Judith Lewis Herman also provides explanation of how the trauma survivor suffers from disorder and anxiety following the recollection of his trauma. She notes that

"Because reliving a traumatic experience provokes such intense emotional distress, traumatized people go the great lengths to avoid it. The efforts to ward off intrusive symptoms, through self-protective in intent, further aggravates the post-traumatic syndrome, for the attempt to avoid reliving the trauma too often results in a narrowing of consciousness, a withdrawal from engagement with others, and an impoverished life" (*Trauma and recovery* 42)

What Herman intends to say here, is that the recollection of trauma pushes one to relive the incident and this causes psychic stress and disorder. As an attempt to avoid this anxiety, the survivors strive to avoid coming to terms with their traumatic past by repressing their memories and imposing self-exclusion and withdrawing themselves from the others.

Michelle Balaev is also a literary critic who introduced trauma theory in his book *Contemporary Approaches In Literary Trauma Theory* noting that "the field of trauma studies in literary criticism gained significant attention in 1996 with the publication of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Narrative, Trauma and History* and Kale Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the literatures of trauma*" (1) These influential works are considered the initial works about trauma theory. They defined trauma as an "unrepresentable event" (1).

Trauma causes breakdown and destruction of identity and also dissociation. Dissociation means that the traumatized individual gets the state of being disconnected from the other. As it is argued by Michelle Balaev "traumatic experience as a pre-linguistic event that universally causes dissociation" (1) "An extreme experience" in Michelle Balaev's words "directly produces a dissociative consciousness wherein the truth of the past is hidden"(5) Trauma victim may respond to trauma by dissociation, as it stated by Balaev "psychological research indicates that amnesia, dissociation, or repression maybe responses to trauma but they are not exclusive responses."(6)

The field of trauma theory developed with the shift in the psychological definition of the concept of trauma and its aspects. As it is explained by Michelle Balaev "the evolution of trauma theory in literary criticism might best be understood in terms of the changing psychological definitions of trauma as well as the semiotic, rhetorical and social concerns that are part of the study of trauma in literature and society" (2)

With the broad change and evolution in the definition of the concept of trauma, the theoretical approach of trauma developed more. The concept of trauma is widely studied by scholars and psychologists. Many definitions are given to the notion of trauma regarding its general effects and aspects. As it is argued by Michelle Balaev "the history of the concept of trauma is filled with contradictory theories and contentious debates, leaving both psychologists and literary scholars the ability to work with varying definitions of trauma and its effects." (2)

After giving an introduction to trauma theory, it is necessary to give the definition of the concept of trauma in order to understand its causes and effects.

Trauma is defined by Cathy Caruth as "trauma, or wound, originally referring to an injury inflicted on a body". Adding that "the term trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (10). From here, we understand that trauma is related much more to the psyche. Trauma also "seems to be much more than pathology or the simple illness of a wounded psyche" (10)

Another definition of trauma is provided by Caruth, it "describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrollable repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (15). Here, Caruth claims that a traumatic experience causes the dissociation of consciousness; because when someone survives a traumatic event in the past, he will be traumatized by the return of the event in the shape of overwhelming memories or hallucinations. "In its general definition, trauma is described as the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares and other repetitive phenomena"(72) what we understand from the definitions provided above is that trauma can be explained as the repetition of the infliction of the wound on the victim. It also means that it is undecipherable, hard to understand and explain, because it is a silent haunting and repetitive reaction, an emotional state that damages the psyche and throws the victim in the state of pain and delusion.

Caruth explains that "What causes trauma, then, is a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time" (51). In her opinion, trauma had been defined according to "the structure of its experience"; "the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (4). She also adds that trauma is "the return of the repressed"

and a sense of absence. (55) Cathy Caruth says that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that it's very unassimilated nature- the way it is precisely not known in the first instance- returns to haunt the survivor later on"(10) What Caruth means is that what is repressed and is not expressed will come back to make surface and haunt the psyche of the victim and cause suffering. At the moment of the experience the victim is unconsciously absent but afterwards, the shock of the incident will resurface and the victim will revive the trauma of the event once again. He may overcome the event they survive but the trauma of that event remains and returns to haunt the survivor's psyche. Caruth argues that "what returns to haunt the trauma victim is Freud's primary example of trauma is not just any event but, significantly, the shocking and unexpected occurrence of any accident" (12). Caruth states that "trauma is not simply an effect of destruction but also, fundamentally an enigma of survival" (49). Paradoxically, trauma is destructive and serves also as medium of construction when it provides the victim with the force to struggle and survive.

The critic Sandra L. Bloom also states that trauma re-surfaces in flashbacks. As she puts it: "a flashback is a sudden intrusive re-experience of a fragment of one of those traumatic, un verbalized memories" (6) Therefore, when someone experiences a flashback, they don't remember the experience, they relive it. In addition, she notes that "during a flashback, people become overwhelmed with the same emotions that they felt at the time of the trauma" (6)

After experiencing a traumatic event, the survivor suffers panic and stress disorder and psychic anxiety. This is known in the field of trauma by post-traumatic stress disorder. It is concerned with the uncontrollable reaction to the trauma. It deals also with the aftermath, effects and the symptoms of trauma to which the trauma victim find themselves exposed to.

Post traumatic stress disorder describes "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth, 49)

The overwhelming events experienced by an individual or collectivity may be called traumatic if they are considered psychologically as a trauma. Ron Eyerman focused in his studies mainly on cultural trauma; in his book *Cultural Trauma Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity*, he argues that "while trauma refers necessarily to something experienced in psychoanalytic accounts, calling this experience traumatic requires interpretation" (3)

A traumatic event has profound impacts and alters many things that give sense to our life. Trauma alters someone's perception because it changes self-confidence through anxiety and paranoia. A trauma victim loses control of himself and what may surround his life is stress, fear, isolation and inferiority complex. Traumatic events are phenomenal because they overwhelm and destroy the natural human adaptation to life. As Herman states: "traumatic events violate the autonomy of the victim... at the moment of trauma, almost by definition, the individual's point of view counts for nothing"(52) For instance, the traumatic experience of rape destroys one's belief and trust and disturbs one's autonomy. As she adds: "in rape, for example, the purpose of the attack is precisely to demonstrate contempt for the victim's autonomy and dignity. The traumatic event thus destroys the belief that one can be oneself in relation to others" (53)

Sandra .L Bloom, MD also explains that: " A traumatic experience impacts the entire person; the way we think, the way we learn, the way we remember things, the way we feel about ourselves, the way we feel about other people, and the way we make sense of the world are all profoundly altered by traumatic experience" (1) When an individual encounters a

traumatic incident, he develops a series of physical or mental symptoms. The symptoms come up as a result of shock at the occurrence of the event.

In his book *Trauma A Social Theory* Jefferey. C Alexander defines trauma saying that "traumas are naturally occurring events that shatter an individual or collective actor's sense of well-being" (7). From this definition, trauma is understood to be an extreme incident that shatters the self and damages the psyche. As he formulates it "people also have continually employed the language of trauma to explain what happens, not only to themselves but to the collectivities to which they belong as well" (7)

Trauma may be explained as an extremely distressing experience that causes severe emotional shock and may have psychological effects, before or after the occurrence of the incident. It is the feeling of being distressed and shocked that makes the incident seem traumatic. As it is stated by Jefferey. C Alexander:

I maintain that events do not, in and of themselves, create collective trauma. Events are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution. This attribution may be made in real time, as an event unfolds; it may also be made. Before the event occurs, as an adumbration, or after the event has concluded, as a post-hoc reconstruction. Sometimes, in fact, events that are deeply traumatizing may not actually have occurred at all; such imagined events, However, can be as traumatizing as events that have actually occurred" (13)

Historical trauma is understood to be the trauma of the collectivity in which we are all implicated in each other's trauma. As it is argued by Cathy Caruth "History, like trauma is

never simply one's own, that history is precisely the way we are implicated in each other's traumas" (24)

Historical trauma refers to "the complex and collective trauma experienced over time and across generations by a group of people who share an identity, affiliation, or circumstance" (qtd in Mohatt) Historical trauma is applied to describe the traumas inflicted on the communities throughout the world. It also refers to "events and experiences that many people consider traumatic". The most traumatic experience that gave birth to the emergence of historical trauma is the Holocaust. Historical trauma describes also the traumatic history of slavery and the traumas experienced by the generations of African Americans. The symptoms of slavery still affect the contemporary generations of black people today, because it is a generational and intergenerational traumatic history. Historical trauma is known to be an intergenerational trauma, and this latter refers "to the specific experience of trauma across familial generations" (qtd in Mohatt) it is noted that historical trauma describes "many other cultural groups and communities that share a history of oppression, victimization, or massive group trauma exposure". Historical trauma is generational because its aspects are experienced by "specific cultural groups across generations and spans the generations not specific individuals" (qtd in Mohatt) In historical trauma, the trauma is collective because it is shared by a group of people, rather than an individually experienced". It is noted that:"the contemporary members of the affected group may experience trauma-related symptoms without having been present for the past traumatizing event(s)" (qtd in Mohatt) Historical trauma refers to the emotional and psychological injury of an individual or generation caused by a traumatic event or experience. It causes depression, anxiety, anger, violence and stress disorder.

Dr Keisha Ross provides the definition of historical trauma in her work about "*Impacts of Historical Trauma on African-Americans and its effects on Help-seeking behaviors*",

”Historical trauma is most easily described as multigenerational trauma experienced by a specific cultural group. Historical trauma can be experienced by “anyone living in families at one time marked by severe levels of trauma, poverty, dislocation, war, etc., and who are still suffering as a result” (1)

It is also called intergenerational trauma because it refers to collectivities and has continual effects across generations. It is not like a personal trauma, but it rather goes from generation to generation.

In the present part, a synopsis of trauma theory is given to acknowledge this field of study as the next part will be devoted to the analysis and study of the characters' traumatic experiences in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. In giving an overview of trauma theory, I have included the most influential works dealing with trauma like *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* by Cathy Caruth and *Contemporary Approaches In Literary Trauma Theory* by Michelle Balaev, in addition to other works that I have mentioned earlier. I have provided the different definitions of the concept of trauma according to the different trauma theorists and critics like Cathy Caruth who defines trauma as a psychic wound rather than a physical injury. She then focuses on its psychic meaning rather than its literal meaning. Trauma is also defined by the scholar Jefferey. C Alexander as the shattering of the sense of well-being.

As I will study the historical trauma of slavery in the following chapter, I have given the definition of historical trauma to show in part how, in both *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, this trauma is inflicted on the generations of African Americans, and in the other part, to project the traumatic disorder and anxiety caused by the trauma of slavery, and expose the overwhelming condition in which the characters live because of their past. So, historical trauma is known to be an intergenerational trauma because it is transfused from one generation to another.

Conclusion

The first chapter is considered as a brief opening to the whole dissertation. It is of prominent importance because it is the doorway through which we can study the following chapter. This chapter is entitled *Toni Morrison's Beloved and A Mercy: text and context*. It includes three important parts that cover this introductory chapter. The first part which provides the textual study of *Beloved* and *A Mercy* includes the plot summary and setting of the two novels in order to have a basic understanding of the narrative and all the events covered in the settings. It also discussed the two common themes of Slavery and motherhood.

The second part deals with their socio-historical context of the two literary works *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. Exploring the socio- historical context of the literary works is also required in an attempt to grasp the overall background and its relation to the texts. This step presents the biography of the African American writer Toni Morrison. It is necessary to introduce her because her body of writing is a commitment for her people's history which gave her universality. She is the Nobel Prize winner of Literature and she is considered the monument of the African American history that restored the heritage of its people through her

works, in particular through *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. The latter explore the forgotten history of slavery and tell the untold stories of the black people. This step gives a brief summary of the real story of Margaret Garner to show the circumstances that inspired Morrison to write *Beloved*.

In the third part of this chapter, I presented an overview of trauma theory which I supported and illustrated with different prominent texts written by influential figures like Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman, Jeffrey C Alexander and Michelle Balaev. I tried to explain and simplify this theory by shedding light on basic definitions of Trauma Theory in general and the concept of trauma in particular. The definition of Historical Trauma is also introduced in this part to discuss the historical trauma of slavery as it is portrayed by Morrison in her two historical fictions: *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. Giving an overview of trauma theory is an important step to the understanding of the following chapter in which the theory will be applied to analyze the characters' traumas and its consequences. In her novels, *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, Morrison depicts the personal traumatic experiences of her characters and brings to the foreground the traces of trauma and its psychic and bodily repercussions.

Chapter Two

The Pariah's Traumatic Experience in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*

Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the study of two of Toni Morrison's prominent facets in her novels *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. It will throw light on the representation of different pariahs in the two books, focusing on both their traumas, using Trauma Theory. It will explore the characters' traumatic experiences. This theory will provide explanatory information to analyzing the traumas and explain how the traumatic incidents that occurred in the lives of these characters overwhelmed them both psychologically and physically. This theory will be applied to show how trauma affected the characters to become pariahs within their own community and society as a whole.

Firstly, I will discuss slavery as a historical trauma in *Beloved* and *A Mercy* and illustrate how the three traumas of rape, abandonment and infanticide resulted from slavery. I will show that infanticide is a trauma which resulted from rape, one of the atrocious incidents that occurred during the era of slavery.

Secondly, I will explore the pariah figures populating *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. This part will clarify how the characters that have experienced traumas in their lives become pariahs, suffering from self-estrangement and social rejection. I will also provide a concise definition of the key concept "pariah" to help explain what is meant by pariah. The pariah figures that will be explored in the present chapter are: Sethe, Denver, Paul D, Florens, Sorrow and Lina. Through the comparison between the three characters of each book, I will show how their traumatic experiences lead to their dissociation and self-estrangement. This chapter will bring trauma to the foreground as the ultimate cause for the characters' rejection.

I. The characters' Traumatic Experiences in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*

Through the reading of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, we understand that the author effectively evokes not only the trauma of the specific individual, but the collective suffering of the larger community as well. Through the characters' different traumatic experiences, Morrison foreshadows the atrocities and harsh incidents of life which the African Americans endured at the time of slavery. Not all experiences in our lives can be easily recounted, people who experience traumatic events face problems and difficulties in recounting their tragic memories, and thus they feel obliged to repress them inside. *Beloved's* and *A Mercy's* characters repressed their memories in an attempt to leave behind a painful past of trauma. This repression causes dissociation from the past and as a result it causes the shattering of the self. The narratives in *Beloved* and *A Mercy* consist of the characters' flashbacks and their central plot revolves around the character's memories which are affected by trauma.

Beloved and *A Mercy* are considered to be the voice of black trauma. They carry the unbearable memories of slavery and the emotional distress that African Americans have suffered. Most of their characters fall painfully victims to many traumatic experiences in their lives. They have been subjected to many methods of tortures for instance whipping, shackling and sexual assaults and so on. They were treated like animals impelling them to wear bits, chains, shackles and collars. In *Beloved*, the ex-slave Paul D was forced to wear a bit in his mouth like an animal. When he recounts to Sethe his memories of Sweet Home, he hides that he once wore a bit in his mouth for feeling ashamed and humiliated. Sethe's mother was also forced to wear a mark on her ear like an animal. Florens' mother was also chained like an animal on board the ship. She preferred to be eaten by the sharks than remain in the horrific condition in which she was inside the ship. She says "I preferred their teeth to the chains

around my neck my waist my ankles" (*A Mercy*, 293). Each one of the characters created by Morrison survives a trauma or traumas that inflicted pain both on his body and psyche. The terrible experiences they have endured caused the dissociation of their consciousness. As it is asserted by Michelle Balaev "extreme experience" "directly produces a dissociative consciousness"(5) Going deeper in the characters' lives we may be affected by their shocking incidents. The protagonist of *Beloved*, Sethe Garner is one of the many sufferers of trauma. She experiences many atrocities in her life. She is whipped mercilessly by the schoolteacher and beaten to death despite her pregnancy. She has been lashed out with rawhide whips that opened dreary scars on her back. She says "the schoolteacher made one open up my back, and when it closed it made a tree" (20). The chock cherry tree on her back is the reminder of her mammary rape. She survives mammary rape and in addition to this she commits infanticide. Due to the atrocious events she went through at the hands of the monstrous schoolteacher, she goes insane and out of control at the moment she sees him and imagines her daughter might survive the same traumas in the future. Sethe loses self-control and has a break in consciousness due to her prior shock. Sethe's trauma of rape is the reason behind her husband's insanity. Halle's insanity is tied with Sethe's rape. Cathy Caruth states that "one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another" (14). Halle witnesses the traumatizing scene of assaults and could not intervene. Paul D tells Sethe that Halle is broken by something, "whatever he saw go on in that barn that day broke him like a twig" (*Beloved* 81). Because Halle represses Sethe's mammary rape he goes mad and suffers from psychic and internal shock. Sethe says: "there is also my husband squatting by the churn smearing butter as well as its clabber all over his face because the milk they took is on his mind" (83) this instance shows that Halle is overwhelmed by his repressive trauma. Halle is, in Barbara Schapiro's words "traumatized by the rape of Sethe and the maternal violation that it also represents, Halle literally loses his mind—his self-hood shatters" (206) Sethe's trauma

causes suffering and pain also to her daughter Denver. Denver suffers from her mother's infanticide which causes her alienation and dissociation. She lives with the fear of being murdered by her mother like it was the fate of her dead sister Beloved, saying: "I love my mother but I know she killed one of her own daughters, and tender as she is with me, I'm scared of her because of it" and "I'm afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again" (242)

Her mother's crime traumatized and scared her to the extent of making repetitive nightmares and hallucinations, imagining her mother trying to kill her, "she cut my head off every night" (243). Her life is confined to her mother's flashbacks and memories of her atrocious past. She is overwhelmed by her mother's terrible crime which causes her emotional distress and anxiety.

Taking the example of Sorrow in *A Mercy*, she endures shipwreck and loses her father. The incident she survived is described as overwhelming: "dead fish", "broken mast", "and dead bodies ", "rocky shoreline". Because she remains in solitude for a long time after the incident, she becomes hallucinating to the point of inventing a friend. Her shock causes her dissociation and speechlessness. She does not interact with the external world; rather, she keeps talking only to her imaginative companion. Her trauma causes her hallucination, as it is noted by Caruth "the response to an overwhelming event occurs in the uncontrollable repetitive appearance of hallucinations" (15). Sorrow never tells anybody of her traumas, she keeps them repressed. When she is found by the sawyers at the shore, she does not answer some of their questions, pretending not to recall her tragic incident. She tries to not reveal her memories to not provoke or intensify her emotional distress. Like Sorrow, Lina is also the only survivor of a traumatic incident. She witnesses the destruction of her tribe by small pox in which she loses all her family. Lina is traumatized by "the pain of her family and all the

others dying around her" (*A Mercy* 76). She lives with the painful memories of her "village peopled by the dead turned slowly to ash" (81) this overwhelming incident leaves her alone immersed in profound pain as an orphan.

The other figure who also suffers from trauma is Rebekka. She suffers from the trauma of death that snatched her children and lives with the memories of their burial. "She is plagued by the repeated tragedy of her infants' deaths" (*Becoming Wilderness: A Look at Betrayal in A Mercy*, 2) She gives birth to many children but they die at their first years except for one child, Patrician who dies at the age of five. She is so profoundly tormented by recalling her babies' burial. She lives with this painful memory that disconnects her from the present and also causes her dissociation. She is traumatized by the death of her children, and she is much more shocked with the death of her five year old daughter because she is the only child who lived longer and the one who succeeded to switch off the fire of pain inflicted upon her with the loss of her prior babies. It is not only the death of her children that traumatized her but also the remembrance of this tragic incident. It is not the traumatic experience itself that produces traumatic effects but rather "the remembrance" of it, as it is pointed by Caruth. With the death of Patrician, she is immersed into melancholy and she is terribly overwhelmed because this death was unexpected, saying that she "had delivered four healthy babies, watched Patrician, her first born, who reached the age of five and provided happiness Rebekka could not believe, lie in her arms for two days before dying from a broken crown" (*A Mercy*, 240) Therefore, Rebekka is haunted by the memory of the shocking incident, as it is stated by Caruth: "what returns to haunt the trauma victim is not just any event but, significantly, the shocking and unexpected occurrence of any accident" (12). In addition to Rebekka, Lina and Sorrow, the other female figure in *A Mercy*, who suffers from trauma, is the protagonist Florens. She grows with the memory of her mother's abandonment. This memory distresses her to the point of dreaming of her mother repeatedly. This tragic incident

of abandonment repeatedly returned to haunt Florens in her dreams. She frequently dreams her "minha mae standing near with her little boy" (*A Mercy*, 186) She also narrates another dream saying: "it is me peering around my mother's dress hoping for her hand that is only for her little boy" (244)

I.1 Slavery as Historical Trauma

The historical trauma that links the two historical fictions *Beloved* and *A Mercy* is slavery. It fragmented the autonomy and the identity of the victims and caused their dissociation. Ron Eyerman states that "the trauma in question is slavery, not as institution or even experience, but as collective memory, a form of remembrance that grounded the identity formation of a people" (1) Slavery is a historical trauma because its effects are being felt by generations of African Americans. It is noted that "historical trauma refers to a complex and collective trauma experienced over time and across the generations" (qtd in Mohatt). Slavery's repercussions are generationally transmitted through biological, psychological, cultural or social means. As it is defined "historical trauma refers to the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding of an individual or generation caused by a traumatic experience or event". Slavery is known to be a historical trauma that occurred years ago but still impacts the present generations of African Americans. Slavery is a traumatic history that gave birth to many other traumas, either psychological, cultural or social For instance in *Beloved*, the character of Denver has not survived the trauma of slavery but she felt the past trauma of her mother and its impacts through its present effects. It is noted that "the contemporary members of the affected group may experience trauma-related symptoms without having been present for the past traumatizing event(s)" (qtd. in Mohatt). Because of slavery, Sethe grew up without a mother and murdered her daughter, that's why she did not develop a profound attachment to her daughter Denver.

Slavery is considered to be an awful collective memory and a wound inflicted upon the whole black community. It is designed as historical and national trauma because it is at once a memory and a part of American history and identity. Arthur Neal defines the concept of national trauma "according to its enduring effects, and as relating to events which cannot be easily dismissed, which will be played over again and again in individual consciousness, becoming ingrained in collective memory" (2). Slavery was traumatic in the past for the slaves and is still alike for the present generation of African Americans, because it is a collective memory whose "enduring effects" are left in pages of history. As it is pointed to by Ron Eyerman: "slavery is traumatic for those who share a common fate, not necessarily a common experience" (14-15)

Slavery is "traumatic in retrospect" and must have been certainly traumatic for those who have experienced it directly. In the light of *Beloved*, the characters that underwent slavery are Sethe, Paul D, Baby Suggs and Halle. Unlike them, the little girl Denver has no memory attached to slavery but she is traumatized obliquely by her mother's traumas. Whereas in *A Mercy* it is Florens' mother who is being enslaved in addition to the other slaves that have populated Vaark's farm like Lina, Sorrow, Florens, Scully and Willard. These figures' past still lingers in their memories because they are constantly living with it. They don't experience the shock at the time of the event's occurrence but rather when they are repeatedly possessed by that event. As Caruth states it: "the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (4)

I.1.1 The Trauma of Infanticide in *Beloved*

The first trauma that figures in *Beloved* is infanticide. Infanticide was a popular crime during the era of slavery. Throughout slavery, many women committed infanticide; either to save

their children from the worst fate of slavery or to get rid of the children forced on them by rape. The infanticide committed in *Beloved* is due to the circumstances of slavery. Toni Morrison has given different views on infanticide through the three black female characters: Sethe, her mother and Ella. *Beloved's* story is inspired by the true incident of a slave named Margaret Garner who ran away and when she was caught by her master, she murdered her daughter with the butcher's knife. It is obviously the trauma of rape which explains and justifies the trauma of infanticide in *Beloved*. As it is articulated by Pamela E. Barnett "the depictions of and allusions to rape are of primary importance; each in some way helps explain the infanticide that marks the beginnings of Sethe's story as a free woman" (qtd in *Bloom's Guides* 70)

Sethe is the most intricate character in *Beloved* because she has gone through so many traumatic experiences in her life. Trauma as a notion is "the individual's own extreme experience" and Sethe's own extreme experience is infanticide; because she has been haunted and tormented by the memories of this incident throughout her life. Cathy Caruth defines trauma as "a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind" (10). So, what we can say is that Sethe's infanticide is a trauma inflicted merely upon her mind because she has been psychically traumatized. Although the act of infanticide is the most atrocious act for a mother to even think of, Sethe does not feel reluctant to murder her children. Sethe resists to slavery with violence. Her infanticide is an extreme action of bravery to prevent her daughter from being dirtied; so that no "gang of whites [would invade] her daughter's private parts, [soil] her daughter's thighs" (*Beloved*, 251). At the time of her recapture, she takes her four children to the woodshed to kill them so that they would not be doomed to the horrors of slavery. However, she succeeds only to murder her two-year old daughter.

Sethe's infanticide is an illogical action and it is impossible to be accepted but perhaps it is her best choice. Sethe's choice of infanticide comes after the traumatic incidents of

whippings and mammary rape she survived in Sweet Home before her escape to Ohio. When Sethe survived the trauma of rape at the hands of the white men and had been mercilessly tortured and whipped, she had not been traumatized immediately at that moment. She seemed numbed physically and psychologically. She becomes traumatized after she starts thinking about what happened to her and recollecting the memories of the incidents. When she starts to recall those memories, she starts to relive them as if they are happening again. It is inferred that it is not the incidents Sethe survived at Sweet Home that traumatized her but rather the remembrance of them, because the recollection of these incidents make her relive the pain anew as if they are still happening. The traumas she survived at Sweet Home at the night of her escape caused the disruption of her consciousness and drove her to madness as she kills her daughter without feeling remorse. She committed infanticide in an unconscious and dissociative state. As it is articulated by Michelle Balaev "trauma causes the disruption and reorientation of consciousness"(04) Michelle Balaev adds that an experience is influenced by a variety of cultural and individual factors. (4) In the case of Sethe, her traumatic experience of infanticide is influenced by some factors or in other words by some other traumatic incidents like: her mammary rape and whippings. These are the external factors that cause her to commit a crime.

It is true that Sethe commits infanticide but it is merely out of her intense love to her daughter. She does not feel remorse for doing so, telling Paul D "it has to be done quick"; because she knows that it is the best thing she has done.(236) Sethe's crime is for one reason, to keep her daughter away from the ghost of slavery and the traumas she has been trapped in. Sethe's action illustrates, as formulated by Morrison, "that the woman who killed her children loved her children so much; they were the best part of her and she would not see them sullied" (*Daughters signifying History*40).

The act of killing her own child is at first not easy to understand and to be justified; however, the circumstances in which Sethe had to live and the brutality that she had endured as a slave on Sweet Home have driven her to commit infanticide, which is one of the worst things a mother can do to her child. It is the act of imagining her children would survive the same atrocities that traumatized Sethe, as it is stated by Jeffrey Alexander "sometimes, in fact, events that are deeply traumatizing may not actually have occurred at all; such imagined events, however, can be as traumatizing as events that have actually occurred" (13)

We learn about the trauma of infanticide through Sethe's flashback and memories; Sethe gave Paul D the details of the incident after he had been told the story by Stamp Paid. With the flashbacks to her infanticide Sethe relives the pain of her past incident and gets traumatized as if she experiences it again. This is explained by Sandra L Bloom, "during a flashback", she argues, "People become overwhelmed with the same emotions that they felt at the time of the trauma" (6)

Sethe cannot live her present because she has been traumatized psychically by the trauma of infanticide and haunted by its memories to the extent of hallucinating. In saying that Sethe is haunted by the memories of her crime, one may understand that she regrets her deed. But it is not the case with Sethe as she tells Paul D 'If I hadn't killed her she would have died and that is something I could not bear to happen to her' (200)

The memory of killing her daughter haunted her and buried her in the sepulcher of trauma. When she thought that she and her children were about to be recaptured by their sadistic slave owner, she reacted instinctively. Sethe's act is nurtured by her maternal love.

When she escapes from Sweet Home she carries with her all the traumatic events she survived like her mammary rape and the bloody scars scribbled on her back. The traumatic

effects of those incidents resurface later on with remembrance. When Sethe remembers how the white men milked her like a cow and the school teacher practiced sexual assault on her and opened her back while pregnant, she suffers from hallucinations and cruel stress disorder and anxiety. Judith Herman explains that reliving a traumatic experience provokes intense emotional distress. (42) Reliving may occur through flashbacks, nightmares and even repression. Sethe does not reveal the nature of her daughter's death. She avoids talking about the infanticide, repressing her trauma. When we try to repress our pain, we are not aware that we are reliving the pain internally and we are exposing ourselves to suffering and trauma. After a traumatic event, we suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Caruth defines post-traumatic stress disorder as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often uncontrolled, repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (49)

Sethe also suffers from stress disorder. Because she has been subjected to mammary rape earlier, she responds to this event with a violent act. She opts for infanticide because she imagines the events she survived would be experienced by her children. This is known in trauma theory as post traumatic stress disorder. It is defined in *the free dictionary* as: "A psychological disorder affecting individuals who have experienced or witnessed profoundly traumatic events, such as torture, murder, rape, or wartime combat characterized by recurrent flashbacks of the traumatic event, nightmares, irritability, anxiety, forgetfulness, and social withdrawal".

In the light of the definition of post traumatic stress disorder, we become aware that Sethe's psyche is stricken by her prior traumatic memories of rape and whipping. Due to these incidents she is subjected to symptoms of psychic stress disorder that are exhibited in her act of infanticide. Sethe is forced into stress disorder and anxiety. We may say that if Sethe had not

been subject to traumatic experiences before, she would not have opted for murder as a way to rescue her infant's life. Infanticide can be seen as the aftermath of the traumatic experience she survived before her escape. Because of her intense fear and anxiety that were due to her prior trauma, she is obliged to commit murder so as her child will not face the same atrocities as her. As it is illustrated by Pamela E. Barnett "Sethe kills her child so that no white men will ever dirty her, so that no young man with mossy teeth will ever hold the child down and suck her breasts"(qtd in *Bloom's Guides* 70)

Infanticide is the trauma that Sethe strives to repress and not talk about. She attempts to not come to terms with it and bury it in her past to not relive its pain, that's why she suffers a lot from disorder and anxiety. This is what Judith Herman explains saying: "because reliving a traumatic experience provokes such intense emotional distress, traumatized people go the great lengths to avoid it"(42)

Toward the end of the novel, we learn that Sethe was about to commit another murder when she sees a white man coming to her house, and whose appearance seems as the schoolteacher's. She mistakes him for the schoolteacher when he came to Ohio to recapture her, years ago. Sethe has been wounded by her past trauma of infanticide that's why she was about to commit another murder. We may say that Sethe's action to murder Mr Bodwin with an ice pick is due to the surfacing of the memory of the school teacher's pursuit to Ohio years ago.

As it is mentioned earlier, the image of infanticide is depicted in *Beloved* through Sethe, her mother and also Ella. They all committed this crime because they have no other choice. It is the incident of rape that traces their action toward infanticide. For Sethe, it is because of rape she undergoes at the hands of the white men and her thick love and motherly instinct that she committed this crime. It is also the trauma of rape that also pushed Ella and

Sethe's mother to reject their babies and kill them. They don't want to keep babies conceived through rape. Their babies are symbols of sexual assault that they have once undergone. They are considered as the painful scar that will recall their trauma of sexual violence. Through flashbacks, we learn about Sethe's mother's infanticide. Sethe has been told by her nurse how her mother has committed infanticide on board the ship. Sethe's mother killed her newborn babies and kept only Sethe. The experience of rape is so horrific that she abandons the other children as a result of abuse. As it is illustrated in *Beloved*: "she threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. Never. Never" (74)

Furthermore, we discover how Ella commits an indirect infanticide because she refuses to nurse the white baby to whom she gives birth. Her rape pushes her to take the ultimate decision of not nursing her baby. She kills her baby by preventing him from sucking her breast milk, because it is her painful symbol of rape.

I.1.2 Trauma of Abandonment in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*

In *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, the two black female characters who experience the trauma of abandonment are Beloved and Florens. They are rejected by their mothers due to the harsh circumstances of life imposed by the bleak ghost of slavery. While Beloved is murdered by her mother, Florens is offered to an Anglo-Dutch trader named Jacob Vaark. They had been both saved of the same worst fate of slavery. Though Sethe and Florens' mother reacted differently to save their daughters from the historical trauma of slavery, both made a rough choice and resisted with violence. While one commits murder, the other gives up her child. During slavery's lifetime, mothers had no other choice to rescue their children, so they found themselves impelled to act violently. Both Sethe and Florens' mothers fall prey to many

atrocities in their lives and among them the incident of rape. For this reason, they were forced to give up their daughters in one way or another to keep them away from the dirt of the white men.

Beloved had been killed by her mother at the age of two and deprived of her life. She comes back to life first as a ghost to haunt the house and then she appears as a girl of the same age she would have been if she was alive. Beloved is reincarnated to find an explanation for her mother's traumatic deed and to question a maternal love she can never understand. Beloved had been rejected by her mother when she was murdered and when Paul D expelled her ghost from the house. Beloved resurfaces to tell Sethe of her pain and sorrow for being left alone and abandoned. She says "Sethe is the face that left me" (*Beloved* 252)

Through Beloved's reincarnation, we learn that Beloved has been profoundly wounded by her mother's evil act. If she had understood her mother's act she would not come back from death to inflict anguish on her mother. Beloved is affected by her mother's loss and abandonment to the extent of becoming obsessed by her "mother hunger". Her love for Sethe has reached a climax. She says "her face is my own and I want to be there in the place where her face is and to be looking at it too" (248). As Sethe acts violently to rescue her daughter, Beloved comes back to possess her mother's love with violence.

Because she is the only child among four that Sethe murdered, she wants to take hold of her mother alone. She seeks to possess the motherly love she missed while her siblings had not. If Sethe had not killed Beloved, she would have been taken back to slavery with her four children and would have been victimized by its atrocities. Sethe murdered her daughter Beloved because she knows the fate she had to face as a slave woman.

In addition to *Beloved*, Florens also suffers a lot from the trauma of abandonment. Florens is abandoned by her mother when she is eight years old, and her mother's rejection becomes traumatic for Florens. Though her mother did a heroic act to save her from the cruelties of slavery, Florens did not acknowledge this sacrifice. She understands that her mother favors her little boy than her. For this reason she says "mothers nursing greedy babies scare me" (10) Florens is inflicted and crippled by loss and separation which are engraved in her psyche. She is affected and wounded right at the time she sees her mother holding her little boy and begging the trader Jacob Vaark to foster her. She grows with this trauma which she remembers vividly and which turns her to become rude and have a psychological disorder. Because she experiences the feeling of rejection in her childhood, she develops fear, violence and anxiety. When she sees a little boy with the blacksmith, she becomes anxious and frightened that she might be abandoned by the blacksmith who may favor the little boy over her. The memory of her abandonment resurfaces and causes her anxiety. She lives and grows with the painful images and memories of her abandonment throughout her childhood, recalling "Me watching, my mother listening, her baby boy on her hip" adding that "a minha mae begs no. Her baby boy is still at her breast. Take the girl she says, my daughter, she says. Me. Me" (*A Mercy*, 8) As she is shocked by her mother's abandonment as a little child, she grows with this trauma, making repeated dreams of her mother and becoming obsessed by stories of motherhood.

The abandonment of her mother is the traumatic experience that Florens endured since her childhood. Though a slave, living under harsh conditions; her mother did not fail to take the opportunity of Vaark's debt to aspire a better life for her daughter. She had given her daughter away so as to not be dirtied as a slave. As it is stated in "*Becoming Wilderness: A Look at Betrayal in A Mercy*": "What her mother felt was a desperate attempt to save her daughter, still too innocent to understand the sexually abusive environment around her" (3)

She addresses Florens saying "I saw the tall man see you as a human child, not pieces of eight"(297). As it is stated by Yi-Jo Hsieh in his article "Trauma and Healing: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Florens' confession in Toni Morrison's *A Mercy*": "as a woman sexually abused by her master, Florens' mother understands that the woman in slavery has no protection" (4) Florens' mother says that "to be female in this place is to be an open wound that cannot heal." (*A Mercy* 288)

I.1.3 Trauma of Rape in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*

Rape is the dominant trauma in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, because it is experienced by many of the characters during slavery. Pamela E. Barnett confirms that rape is the most atrocious trauma that is survived by *Beloved*'s characters (*qtd. in Bloom's Guides* 71). Rape is a trauma because it is an injury that strikes both the body and the psyche of the victim. Looking at the definition of trauma, it is a wound inflicted upon the mind and the body.

In these historic fictions, Morrison does a great job in looking into the horrendous trauma of rape. It is one of the most atrocious and horrible deeds of slavery practiced against the slaves. Pamela E. Barnett states that "*Beloved* is haunted by the history and memory of rape specifically" (*qtd. in Bloom's Guides* 70).

When looking at *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, the trauma of rape encompasses the lives of most of the characters like: Sethe, her mother, Baby Suggs, Paul D, Ella, Stamp Paid's wife, Sorrow and Florens' mother. All of these victims are black people and most of them are slaves. They have endured the traumatic incident of sexual abuse which fragmented their being and traumatized them not only physically but also psychologically. Shelby Larrick notes in her article "Psychological Criticism of Toni Morrison's *Beloved*" that "slaves faced extreme brutality and Morrison focuses on rape and sexual assault as the most terrifying form

of abuse. It is because of this abuse that Morrison's characters are trapped in their pasts, unable to move on from the psychological damages that they have endured"(04) they live with the memories of their traumatic experience of rape.

In *Beloved*, the trauma of rape is not portrayed directly, but we have been given glimpses into this trauma throughout the flashbacks and memories of the characters. As Robin Field articulates in his article *Tracing Rape: The Trauma of Slavery in Toni Morrison's Beloved*: "Morrison seeks not to present a comprehensive portrait of the act of rape and its bodily and psychic repercussions, but instead to offer glimpses into the traumatic event as it gradually becomes comprehensible to its survivors." (1)

The trauma of rape is not detailed in the novel but allusions to it are given throughout Sethe's and Paul D's flashbacks and throughout Florens' confession. Robin Field notes that "in *Beloved*, we do not read detailed descriptions of sexual assault. Instead, the allusions concentrate upon the incomprehensibility of the trauma." (1)

In *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, we find words that make reference to the traumatic experience of rape. Therefore, we as readers become aware of the existence of this trauma. As Robin Field states "the traces of rape in *Beloved* most often appear in one or two sentences that reveal the existence of the trauma" (2) *Beloved* makes many references to sexual violation, for instance in the Sweet Home plantation the male slaves dream of "minus women, fucking cows, dreaming of rape"(*Beloved* 13).

Starting with the ex-slave and intricate character Sethe Garner, she has been victimized by rape. She is plagued by sensory flashbacks and uncontrollable thoughts of her mammary rape. Sethe has endured rape since she was living at Sweet Home. Despite her pregnancy, she has been abused by the schoolteacher and his nephews. She was assaulted by

the boys who took her milk and by the schoolteacher who raped her. She hates and feels disgust for her body because the white men stain it with their traces of dirt and obscenity. At the beginning she avoids telling about her rape but when she begins telling about her escape, she reveals what happened to her, telling Paul D "after I left you, those boys came in there and took my milk. That's what they came in there for. Held me down and took it" (19). In explaining what happened to her, particularly her mammary rape, she feels overwhelmed, repeating the expression "and they took my milk" (20). The critic Jeffrey C. Alexander notes "people have also continually employed the language of trauma to explain what happens" (7). It is the case of Sethe, she uses the language of trauma to narrate her mammary rape

During the era of slavery, the white masters took advantage of female slaves' harsh conditions to have sex with them. This is an indirect assault experienced against women at that time. Sethe was also subjected to another abuse by feeling impelled to have ten minutes of sex with an engraver; so as to write the name of her baby on the gravestone after she murdered it. "Ten minutes, he said. You got ten minutes I'll do it for free" (5). She prostitutes her body to the engraver as it is stated by Jeffrey Andrew Winstock "her knees wide open as any grave, Sethe exchanges ten minutes for seven letters, ten minutes of sex for the inscriptions of the word Beloved on the tombstone of her murdered child." *qtd in Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations* 75). When Sethe recalls her trauma of infanticide, she obviously recalls her sexual relationship with the engraver. If she had not murdered her child, she would not have traded her body. These two awful tragedies caused her anxiety and psychic chaos. Sethe was forced to prostitute her body to save her child and she was also obliged to trade her body to write on the grave of her daughter. Slave women' bodies are the price that vents the white men's lust. Through Sethe's plight, Morrison illustrates the bleak condition of black women at the time of slavery when they had no possession of their body.

It is not only Sethe's body that is violated but also her sacred motherhood. The white men took the milk from her breasts with power and force her down like an animal. They deprive her of her body and even of her possession. Through Sethe's rape, Toni Morrison aspires to show the sexual atrocities from which slave women suffered in the American society. The robbery of her sacred milk inflicts pain and trauma upon her more than the rape of her body.

The other character that suffers the deep trauma of rape in *Beloved* is the ex-slave Paul D. Actually he experiences this incident twice and becomes traumatized. When he was in Alfred, he is terribly shocked and shattered by the trauma of sexual assaults. He feels powerless and deprived of his manhood and dignity. Rape is a trauma and trauma is defined by Jeffrey C. Alexander as a natural event that shatters the well-being (7). The white men practiced sexual assaults on the slaves to humiliate them, strike their dignity and make them feel worthless. Alexander says "in rape, for example, the purpose of the attack is precisely to demonstrate contempt for the victim's autonomy and dignity" (53)

In Georgia prison, Paul D, as other prisoners, was forced to felicitate prison Guards on the chain gang every morning. He was forced to commit sexual acts beyond his will otherwise he would be sentenced to death. "Convinced he was next, Paul D retched – vomiting up nothing at all. An observing guard smashed his shoulder with the rifle and the engaged one decided to skip the new man for the time being lest his pants and shoes get soiled by nigger puke" (*Beloved* 108)

The second time in which Paul D was subjected to this trauma was at the hands of the girl Beloved. Beloved forced Paul D out of Sethe's bed and then out of the house to find himself sleeping in the shed and was impelled to have sex with her. She forces him to touch her "You have to touch me. On the inside part. And you have to call me my name" *Beloved*,

117). Paul D has been sexually assaulted by Beloved who has power over him and forces him to do what he does not want to. Pamela E. Barnett notes that Beloved is "a female demon and nightmare figure that sexually assaults male sleepers and drains them of semen" (qtd in Robin field 6)

Paul D is the figure that embodies and illustrates male victims of rape. Because of this horrific incident he is left in a sense of trauma and deprived of his manhood. It is the trauma of rape that pushes him to block his past in "a tin box". His tin box gets opened and spills all the horrific memories and incidents he endured as a slave. When he is raped by Beloved, Paul D falls in the memories of the past as if he is experiencing again the events he buried in his heart, mourning "red heart, red heart, red heart" (138)

Paul D repressed the sexual assault he endured at the prison and never told anyone about it. He buried it in his tobacco tin. When Beloved reached his box, he becomes traumatized because he recalls his repressed trauma. Caruth says trauma is the return of the repressed. So, Paul D is traumatized by the reappearance of the trauma of rape he once repressed inside.

Looking at Sethe's and Paul D's conversation, we learn that both of them avoid talking about their rape. They both repressed the incidents that terribly tormented their psyche. However, when Sethe narrates her escape from Sweet Home, she fails to repress her mammary rape because her trauma returns in flashbacks against her will. As it is articulated by Caruth "trauma is the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits" (59) Both Paul D and Sethe have profound traumatizing and anxious feelings due to the repression of their prior traumas. Alexander C. Jeffrey states that "traumatic feelings and perceptions, then, come not only from the originating event but also from the anxiety of keeping it

repressed" (10) Therefore, Paul D feels terribly overwhelmed because he keeps his sexual assault closed in his tin box.

It is noted by Pamela E. Barnett that in *Beloved* "rape is the trauma that forces Paul D to lock his many painful memories in a "tobacco tin" that Sethe remembers more vividly than the beatings that leaves a tree of scars on her back, that destroys Halle's mind, and against which Ella measures all evil." (qtd. in Bloom's Guides, 71)

Toni Morrison speaks again of the trauma of rape in *A Mercy* through the two black female characters Sorrow and Florens' mother. There are many instances in the novel that show the existence of this trauma. Sorrow is one of the many female sufferers of the traumatic incident of rape. She has been frequently sexually abused by different men and gave birth twice; "Sorrow was pregnant and soon there would be another virgin birth and, perhaps, unfortunately, this once would not die" (*A Mercy* 96).

At the Sawyers' house, Sorrow falls prey and victim to the Sawyer's sons who take advantage of her presence to satisfy their sexual need. It is said that she is "a strange melancholy girl" to whom the Sawyer's sons "were paying very close attention" (87) Sorrow tells of her rape saying "on occasion she had secret company other than Twin, but not better than Twin"(218) Reading *A Mercy*, we learn that Sorrow is often accompanied by her imaginary friend Twin and never left alone. From Sorrow's confession, we understand that Sorrow has been forced to be in secret company with someone else than her usual companion Twin. She is sexually assaulted at the hands of these men. Sorrow, being a little immature girl, knows nothing of pregnancy. The sexual abuse she experiences impregnates her. She speaks to her friend Twin about what happened to her; wondering what happens to her body "whether it (her pain) was instead the result of the goings that took place behind the stack of

clapboard, both brothers attending" (218) Sorrow does not know that she is pregnant, it is Lina who informs her, saying that "her stomach was low with child" (94)

This traumatic incident causes Sorrow's fear and dissociation. After the shipwreck she becomes alienated and detached; but the rape she endures impels her to become much more dissociated than ever, Michelle Balaev considers "traumatic experience as a pre-linguistic event that universally causes dissociation"(1). This dissociation originates from the traumatic feeling she has experienced after her trauma of rape. She has only her inventive friend Twin to reveal her pain that's why all her shock is repressed. Jeffrey Alexander states that traumatic feelings originate from the anxiety of keeping the event repressed (10) Caruth says "trauma, or wound, originally referring to an injury inflicted on a body" (10) Therefore, Sorrow's sexual abuse is the trauma that inflicts pain on her body and causes her pregnancy. Sorrow reveals to Twin that "the pain was outside between her legs not inside, where the housewife said was natural (*A Mercy* 218)

In addition to Sorrow, the other female figure who is victimized by rape during the era of slavery is Florens' mother. Like all slave women, she experiences sexual abuse and is treated like an animal at the hands of the monstrous white men who have lust for black women. At the end of the story, Florens' mother addresses Florens telling her "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" (291). This scene suggests that Florens' mother has been raped, and as a result she gave birth to Florens. Florens and her little brother are perceived through rape. It is because of the trauma of sexual abuse that Florens' mother attempts to take her daughter away. She becomes consciously aware that her master has an eye on her daughter who begins to grow to a mature woman. Because she is a slave and endures the trauma of sexual assaults, she knows that her daughter would

experience the same trauma in her life. For this reason, she abandons her, saying: "Neither one will want your brother. I know their tastes. Breasts provide the pleasure more than simpler things. Yours are rising too soon and are becoming irritated by the cloth covering your little girl chest. And they see and I see them see." (289)

These figures who have survived rape suffer from post traumatic stress disorder because their psyche is triggered by the terrifying incident of rape. Sethe, Paul D and Sorrow suffer stress disorder because they are entrapped in anxiety and have uncontrollable thoughts about their incident. They live in hallucinations and dissociation. All of them opted for repression as a response to their traumas. For instance Sethe and Sorrow are detached from the present and find themselves daydreaming because they are immersed in memories. They become haunted by the memories of their past incident and relive its overwhelming effects. Trauma is relived in the present through repeated flashbacks, nightmares and hallucinations. Traumatic experience is so strong to be recorded fully in the consciousness as it happens and is therefore unavailable to conscious remembrance.

Through her two historic fictions, *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, Morrison brings to the foreground the different traumatic and painful experiences that many of her characters survived during the era of slavery. All of them attempted in one way or another to repress their painful memories in order to escape their pain and emotional distress. Judith Herman notes that "because reliving a traumatic experience provokes such intense emotional distress, traumatized people go to the great lengths to avoid it" (42)

In going deeper in the lives of these characters, we draw the conclusion that the traumas inflicted upon these victims left many painful wounds and scars difficult to heal. As a result of their traumas, they become pariahs, or in other terms, the social outcasts of society.

These characters have endured terrible incidents in their lives that impelled them to become the outsiders and the marginals of the black community.

II. The Representation of the Pariah Figure in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*

In most of her novels, Toni Morrison devotedly treated the marginalization of the black community. She depicts the African American pariahs through her marginalized characters. She illustrates the problems the African American people face in their own society. Cristina D'Imperio notes that "Morrison continues the trend of her earlier novels by depicting alienated, abandoned, and isolated individuals"(224) In *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, Morrison speaks of trauma and the ostracized black community from the perspective of her characters. These characters evoke the image of black people within the pariah black community. As it is argued by Morrison in her conversation with Danille Taylor-Guthrie, "there are several levels of the pariah figure working in my writing. The black community is a pariah community. Black people are pariahs" (168)

Beloved and *A Mercy* present a range of characters that have experienced terrible incidents in their lives and consequently, they are rejected by society. Morrison articulates the traumas of her characters that are viewed as society's outcasts, who suffer a lot from dissociation because of their past traumatic experiences. The repercussion of these experiences is pariah status and dissociation. With dissociation, we mean the loss of contact with reality. In Michelle Balaev's words it is "a traumatic experience as a pre-linguistic event that universally causes dissociation" (1)

These characters opted for the repression of the emotional feelings related to their traumas, and responded to their traumatic experiences with dissociation, that's why they become outcasts suffering from being self-estranged, detached and shattered. Dissociation

causes emotional psychic pain hard to heal with time. All of them become pariahs because their sense of identity is as well dissociated. They tragically suffered from their alienation like aliens. As it stated by Jimenez, Teresa G "Morrison extends the condition of being orphan to all her characters, who represent a cross-section of 17th Americans" (3) Toni Morrison, as it is noted by Cristina D'Imperio, portrays in *A Mercy* "a group of disconnected individuals who, despite their mutual hardships in the wilderness, cannot form enough of a community to "survive whole." (229)

The black characters Sethe, Denver, Paul D, Florens, Sorrow and Lina are all rabble living with an estranged status, embodying the pariah black community. They suffer from social rejection and self-estrangement, out of touch with themselves. They are orphaned and forced to live as foreigners in their society. These characters have never fully recovered from their traumatic experiences; as long as they live with their traumas, they can only be pariahs because they live with dissociated personality. They do not comprehend the cause of their rejection and shattered self, due to the repression of their past. All of these characters attempted in one way or another to hide their traumatic past and avoid coming to terms with their memories. They feel reluctant and powerless to confront their past, and this dissociation from the past is what brings about their self-alienation. For this reason, they all suffer from dissociation and stress disorder. "An extreme experience" as it is pointed by Michelle Balaev "directly produces a dissociative consciousness wherein the truth of the past is hidden" (5)

All of them are orphaned under the harsh circumstances of slave life in wild America. They are all burdened with the same affliction of dissociation as a result of their traumatic lives and hold the pariah status in their own vicious community. Being traumatized, they feel that their existence is meaningless. Despite their different traumatic experiences, they share some obvious similarities such as psychic disorder, rejection and dissociation. Their traumas

are what impel them to reject themselves and to be rejected by the community. They don't only suffer from being rejected by the others but also suffer from rejecting themselves. Their dissociation and social rejection are the consequences of the devastating traumas they have endured. "Trauma" in Manuela Lopez Raminez's words, "brings about ostracism and, finally, may lead to the destruction of the sense of self"(77).

The pariahs populating Morrison's two books are Sethe, Paul D, Denver, Florens, Sorrow and Lina. They all have emotional conflicts because they are struggling with their self-estrangement and suffer from the feeling of being rejected within and/ by the community.

III.1 The Pariah: Definition

Beloved and *A Mercy* are populated by a large array of pariah figures subjected to many traumatic experiences that terribly sow seeds of estrangement within their soul. The horrible traumas they have experienced compelled them to become pariahs or rather wear the identity of social outcasts in society. The theme of this research work is the pariah figures in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. The term pariah may seem unfamiliar and unusual, therefore, it is valuable to define it first and give its brief history and etymology.

To start, the term "pariah" is coined by Europeans though it has its origin in India. According to the *British Dictionary*, pariah is a term that "refers to a social outcast and a member of a low caste in South India". The word pariah dates back to "the 1610's from the Portuguese paria which means drummer". So, pariah is known to be a hereditary drumbeater. This term is applied by "Hindus and Europeans to any members of low Hindu castes and even to outcasts." In 1819, the meaning of pariah extended to "social outcast". Pariah is a word "originally stems from the caste system of India, which put pariahs in a very low place in society" (*Dictionary.com*)

The term pariah is understood as “a person who is rejected from society or who is an outcast”. (*YOUR dictionary*) We may say that the term “pariah” is not merely confined to the meaning of a stray or outcast, but it is also used to embrace orphan or in other words, someone who loses his family and lives in solitude or someone who is in exile. We learn about the origin of the word pariah as follows

“The word pariah begins to appear in English in travelers' accounts of Indian society. One such occurrence of the word dates from as early as 1613. As British colonial power began to expand in India, lower, the British began to use the word pariah in a general sense for any Indian person considered an outcaste or simply of low caste in the traditional Indian caste system. By the 1800's, pariah had come to be used of any person, who despised, reviled or shunned.”(*YOUR dictionary.com*)

In her article “*The outcasts of the world- Images of the pariah*”, Eleni Varikas provides a well-structured definition of the term “pariah” summarizing its meaning and its etymology, in which she inserted tales and legends where the term pariah was first used. She notes that “the introduction of the pariah in the western political culture and vocabulary is marked by paradoxes and ironies” (31) She adds that the term “although originally from India is unknown in that country” (31). It is stated in this article that according to the Hobson-Jobson glossary, an authoritative source of Anglo-Indian words and phrases, at least in its western sense, the term was “unknown to all the natives, except those who learned it from us”. “Pariah is a term coined by the Europeans as a result of the metonymic use of the word *parayer*, drummer, never actually belonged to the Indian vocabulary.” (31)

The term "pariah" was used for its pejorative connotation as it is pointed out by Elenie Varikas: "the online dictionary of Indian English includes an automatic warning about the offensive nature of the word, which has also been either removed from or mitigated in the latest editions of major British dictionaries." (31) The term pariah has a negative sense and it is argued that "the ordinary meaning of which "outcast"; "rabbale"; "abandoned" or "stray" has largely prevailed over the critical meanings that designate exclusion, inequality and injustice- which are predominant concepts in France, Germany, the United States and other western nations." (31). Therefore, pariah is attributed to the outcasts of society, those undesirable, ostracized and abandoned.

Pariah is a word that exists since sixteenth century; and it was only till the eighteenth century that it comes to usage in the literary and political fields in Europe as underlined by the historian and professor Eleni Varikas:

"From the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, the word "pariah" and the reality it represented - and reestablished - circulated in educated Portuguese, English, French, Dutch and Scandinavian milieus, following the detachments of the military, imperial officials, priests, missionaries and scientists. People talked about *Pareas*, who have "the worst of reputations" and *Piriawes*, who were "obnoxious [...] hated public executioners [...] the vilest, most stinky and disgusting men I've ever seen". (33)

As it is also stated by Elenie Varikas: "in the Encyclopédie, the word pares, perréas, parias, as well as poulias, poulichis or poulchis emphasize the inhuman and irrational character of the treatment bestowed to this "class of men" deemed "unworthy of participating in the advantages of humanity." "(39)

She declared that pariah is a name that "designates the idolatrous inhabitants of Hindustan, *a class of men separated from all others*, which is the object of their *horror* and their *contempt*. They are not allowed to live with the others; they live on the outskirts of towns or in the countryside, where they have wells for their use, from which no other Indians draw water" (39)

The word pariah may seem strange because it is rarely employed in literary works. Elenie Varikas mentioned some stories and legends in which the word pariah had been used. She announced in her article that it was introduced in one of the key sources written in the 19th entitled "*The Indian Cottage*". The latter is a "philosophical tale" written by Bernardin de Saint-Pierre (1818, ed., 1792) who introduced the term pariah and the figure of the pariah.

The word "Pariah" has been used by the African American laureate Toni Morrison in a conversation. With Danille Taylor-Guthrie in which she says that:

"There are several levels of the pariah figure working in my writing. The black community is a pariah community. Black people are pariahs. The civilization of black people that lives apart from but in juxtaposition to the other civilizations is a pariah relationship. In fact, the concept of the black in this country is almost always one of the pariah. But a community contains pariahs within it that are very useful for the conscience of that community." (*Conversations with Toni Morrison* 168)

In the light of Morrison's saying, I will lay emphasis on the pariah figures in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, and depict their ostracism showing why and how they are expelled from the

community. Morrison here states that her people are mournfully perceived with racist eyes and are considered the marginals of society, and that everything related to the blacks is to be considered of low esteem. The blacks were considered to be the low and second class citizens who carry the black label of the other in a racist society.

Within her two literary fictions, *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, the Laureate Morrison depicts the abandoned black community during the era of slavery. She elaborates on the large array of pariah figures populating her two books to portray her black people and show the problems they face in their own community. Through her pariah characters such as Sethe, Denver, Paul D in *Beloved* and Florens, Sorrow and Lina in *A Mercy* Morrison shows that their personal traumatic experiences are related to the African Americans. She projects how these events influenced their personalities and caused their alienation by and within society.

II.2 The Pariah Figures in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*

In the light of *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, Morrison shows how her characters are struggling with their estrangement and rejection to reconstruct their shattered self and fight for their sense of belonging in a marginalized community. Morrison's fiction is structured around the story of pariahs. All of the black characters, for instance, Sethe, Denver, Paul D Florens, Lina and Sorrow suffer from dissociation and self- estrangement and live in alienation. They are the undesirable, “rabble”, “abandoned” and “strays” of the community. Each character has his own story and reason for becoming a pariah. They live as wanderers and strays without giving sense to their existence. Morrison's characters are strays “who are disconnected from themselves, from each other, and from community” (Betty Jane Powel 105) Taking the example of Sorrow and Lina, they have both suffered from the traumatic death of their families, that's why they are psychically shattered, living on the margin of society like aliens. As it is stated by Manuela López Ramírez “the individual who has suffered a traumatic death in the family might appear

to be 'damaged', occupying a devalued and marginal position in the midst of the community" (76)

II.2.1. The Pariah Figures in *Beloved*

The pariah figures populating *Beloved* are the ex-slave Sethe, her daughter Denver and the ex-slave Paul D. They are all confined within their solitude and self estrangement suffering from marginalization in their own community. They are the undesirable and unacceptable class of society living with a shattered self like outcasts. In *Beloved*, as it is asserted by Betty Jane Powell, "Toni Morrison writes about the need for victimized people to form an integrated self in the face of a fragmented and unacceptable existence." (105) The figure of Sethe becomes an outcast because she is rejected by the community for committing infanticide. She is a pariah also because due to the repression of her prior slave incidents, she suffers from self estrangement. Concerning Denver, she is an alienated figure because of her mother's traumatic past. Whereas Paul D like Sethe has a life of an outcast due to the traumatic past of slavery.

Sethe

Sethe is a pariah figure who suffers from both self rejection and social alienation because of her past traumatic experiences. As a social outcast, she is afflicted with a misty sense of self. Her self is fragmented because she prefers to "keep her past at bay" (42) She suffers a lot from dissociation, because it stems in part from her orphanhood and in other part from the traumatic experiences she endured during slavery. Sethe is an orphan like all other slaves, she is taken away from her mother still an infant and she barely remembers her. She becomes an outcast first when she is abandoned and rejected by her mother.

She is impelled to reject herself to not come to terms with her traumatic memories and she is also being rejected by the others due to her crime of infanticide. She is rejected by the

community for committing such crime. Sethe is traumatized by being rejected and impeached as a dirty person by the community. They did not accept her irrational actions and punished her. Sethe lives with her estranged status on the margin of the community like a foreigner because she is undesirable, no one talks to her and she talks to no one. Sethe is a rabble, having a dirty reputation within the community of 124 due to her past crime. She lives within her traumatic past and she encloses herself and keeps herself in solitude. She becomes an alienated figure because of this past. As it is put by Wang Lei Sethe is “feeling estranged and expelled by the very people she treats as part of herself, she refuses to attend Suggs’ funeral service in order to avoid the community and social contact, and although she attends the burial, she refuses to “[join] in the hymns the others [sing] with all their hearts” (qtd in *The Uncanny Object in Toni Morrison's fiction*, 115)

Sethe lives with her daughter Denver like the outcasts of society. She even distances herself from her lonely Denver because she is immersed in her traumatic memories all the time. She encloses herself at home because she feels that “there is no world outside” (184). Sethe lives for eighteen years like an outcast with Denver, till the day Paul D appears at their house and makes them fly out of their cage like trapped birds. Since her infanticide, Sethe has never stepped out to the community, till the day she accompanied Paul D and her daughter Denver to the carnival, as Barbara Schapiro explains “the excursion to the carnival is Sethe's first venture into the community since the murder” (204)

Therefore, the repercussion of Sethe's traumas is her becoming a pariah figure. Sethe suffers from the feeling of dissociation after she experiences mammary rape. She feels she is dispossessed and robbed of her body and self. Her bodily violation inflicted pain upon her and as a result she is self shattered and is pushed to reject her self and hate her body. In the aftermath of her mammary rape, Sethe suffers from self estrangement and has a dissociated

self, because as a slave, she cannot claim ownership. She claims "freeing yourself was one thing; and claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (95)

It is because of the same trauma of infanticide that Sethe is rejected and abandoned by Paul D and her two sons. Barbara Schapiro explains that "Sethe has been abandoned once again by Paul D (her previous abandonments include those by her mother, her husband Halle, Baby Suggs, and her two sons)" (203)

Sethe is a self estranged character because she refuses to accept herself and reconcile herself with the past. Because she avoids coming to terms with her past life and confront her traumatic memories, she is rejecting herself. The one who ignores his past he is in the process of rejecting himself obliquely. Sethe attempts to repress everything that recalls her past, and consequently she imposes self-exclusion and withdraws herself from the others. As it is asserted by Judith Lewis Herman "for the attempt to avoid reliving the trauma too often results in a narrowing of consciousness, a withdrawal from engagement with others, and an impoverished life" (42) Sethe is a pariah, keeping herself and her daughter on the margin of the community, enclosed within the confines of solitude. In fact, it is Sethe's estrangement which intensifies Denver's. As it is asserted by Denver "Ma'am would not let me go outside in the yard and eat with the others. We stayed inside" (247)

Denver

Denver is Sethe's youngest infant. She is a "timid" but a "hard-headed" daughter (117). She lives lonely with her mother after her brothers Howard and Buglar left the house and her grandmother Baby Suggs died. She is a marginal because she finds herself in solitude and develops the attitude of estrangement. She has a marginal status because she is an orphan

living in solitude and silence. As it is asserted in the novel “solitude made her a secretive—self-manipulated” (117)

The alienation of Denver stems in part from her childhood memory of infanticide. Denver takes part in Sethe's infanticide because she drinks her sister's blood with her mother's milk. She is told by her brothers of her mother's murder. Consequently, she develops anxiety and fear. She lives with her mother's trauma of infanticide which dissociates her self. The fear in which Denver lives shatters her being, she is even “thinking everybody had body but her” (123). She grows fearing her mother, saying “I spent all of my outside life loving Ma'am so she wouldn't kill me, loving her even when she braided my head at night.” (245). She loves her mother but she constantly fears that her mother might murder her, just as she did with her sister Beloved. It is the anxiety with her mother's crime that causes her rejection and hinders her from stepping out of the house to the community. She dissociates herself from her mother because she is skeptical toward her.

It is due to Sethe that Denver grows like a pariah. She is even imprisoned along with her mother as a punishment for her crime. Her isolation is intensified when she is embarrassed and offended by her classmate's questions of her mother's crime. “Murder, Nelson Lord had said. Didn't your mother get locked away for murder? Wasn't you in there with her when she went” (*Beloved*, 123) she is traumatized by the offensive attitude of her classmate about her mother's crime, to the extent of enclosing herself at home. She refuses to come back to school because “it was Nelson Lord—the boy as smart as she was—who put a stop to it; who asked her the question about her mother that put chalk, the little *i* and all the rest that those afternoon held, out of reach forever” (120-21)

Denver does not dare to ask anyone about her classmate's question, even to her mother because “certain odd and terrifying feelings about her mother were collecting around the thing

that leapt up inside her"(119) Denver is treated like a pariah "being avoided by her classmates—that they made excuses and altered their pace not to walk with her" (120). She is rejected with her mother by the community because of the cruel crime Sethe committed in the past. She grows in solitude and the rejection afflicted on her causes her pain and anxiety, saying "Nobody comes to this house anymore" (245). As it is noted in a dialogue with her mother Sethe: "I can't no more. I can't no more." "Can't what?" What can't you? "I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either."(17) Shelby Larrick notes that "No children have ever dared to seek closeness with Denver. Such solitude can cause severe psychological damage, and Denver struggles to find a sense of meaning and purpose to her life" (03)

Denver is an outcast because she also suffers from orphanhood. She is orphaned by her father whom she waits for with impatience; and for whom she craves love, calling him "Angel man" (246). She is also orphaned by her mother because she is somehow abandoned by her, missing her care, love and attention. Because she grows up with an insufficient maternal sympathy, Denver develops dissociation with her mother and the external world.

Paul D

Paul D is also *Beloved's* pariah figure. Like Sethe, he is also silenced by the trauma of slavery. He is psychically shattered and feels no belonging to the community. Paul D becomes an outcast after the terrible experiences he endured in slavery. The savagery and atrocities Paul D experienced in his life at the hands of the schoolteacher and the white men in Georgia prison drive him to doubt his manhood. Due to his prior traumas, he feels powerless and manless and consequently he rejects and estranges himself. His traumas afflicted self alienation upon him and caused dissociation from himself and from the others.

He lives like a pariah, a wanderer and an outcast, saying to Sethe "I'm a walking man, but I been heading in this direction for seven years. Walking all around this place. Upstate, downstate, east, west; I been in territory ain't got no name, never staying nowhere long." (55) Being traumatized in the past, he finds no sense in life. When he escapes from sweet home, he spends his life wandering aimlessly, he has no connection with the others. Paul D is "wandering through eighteen years of life as a foreigner" (120). And then his long errand ended at Sethe's house in the community of 124 Blue Stone Road. Sethe is the only person who welcomes him and opens her house to him. He puts an end to his outcast life by living with Sethe and her daughter Denver; but with the presence of Beloved, Paul D is rejected by Sethe. Feeling rejected by Sethe who proves the presence of her daughter than him, Paul D returns to his life of pariah by leaving the house. Being a foreigner in 124, Paul D finds refuge in the church because no one in the community seeks to offer him help. Paul D wanders for eighteen years, carrying his traumatic past in "that tobacco tin buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut" (72-73)

Paul D suffers from the shattering of the self because he does not want to confront his past. Like Sethe, he represses and buries his awful past memories. Because he represses his past, he is dissociating himself from his true identity. This repression brings about his rejection from the others. However with Sethe, he opens his tobacco tin and recollects all the traumatic memories he buried years ago.

II.2.2. The Pariah Figures in *A Mercy*

The three female characters, Lina, Sorrow and Florens are all orphans, having a life of an outcast because they have survived horrible incidents in their lives which caused their sense of rejection. Lina and Sorrow are orphaned with the death of their families, whereas Florens is orphaned with her mother's abandonment. All of them experienced orphan hood again with the

death of Jacob Vaark. It is Jacob who puts an end to their wandering life and orphanhood by giving them refuge and a family life. The illness of their mistress Rebekka threatened the lives of these girls because they may be subjected to “exile”. They all confined themselves within the farm and detached themselves from the outside community. Being orphans and having the status of an estranged figure, they are undesirable within their racial patriarchal society.

Sorrow

Sorrow is an unnamed girl who is given the name of Sorrow because “she was abandoned” (219) She is “a strange melancholy girl” who endured two terrible traumas in her life; shipwreck and rape (87) She is a survivor of a tragic shipwreck in which she becomes traumatized and loses her father, her only companion in life. In the aftermath of this incident, Sorrow becomes a pariah and an orphan, finding herself alone with no family.”Sorrow's loss of family” as it is stated by Jimenez, Teresa G is “the result of a pirate's raid of the ship she lived on” (10). This overwhelming incident “causes her to experience a psychic spilt” (10), a psychic disorder and she withdraws herself into a world of pariah. The shipwreck results in Sorrow's "shattered self” as it is noted by Manuela López Ramírez, because the ship was “her home” (84) After the incident, Sorrow remains for a long time alone on the shore like an alien to the extent of hallucinating. Because she is dissociated from people for a long time she becomes a strange girl, and to fight her loneliness, she invents an imaginary friend named Twin. Twin, as it is stated “ultimately compound Sorrow's alienation, by causing her to retreat into a world no other soul can enter. Indeed, her imaginary Twin disables Sorrow from forging “real life” bonds with those around her.” (Jimenez 11) She lives as a pariah who has no connection with the others. The invention of this friend keeps Sorrow distant from the others. “With no one to talk to, she relied on Twin more and more” (*A Mercy* 225) She rejects everybody around her and interacts only with Twin; it is what causes her dissociation. Twin

intensifies and imposes alienation upon her. Sorrow's reliance upon Twin for "friendship [and] conversation", as it is noted by Jimenez, Teresa G, "detracts from her ability to connect meaningfully with those around her, by, making their friendship and conversation superfluous." (Jimenez 11) In addition to shipwreck; Sorrow goes through the terrible trauma of rape. These traumatizing experiences shattered her and thus bring about her alienation. For this reason she developed a schizophrenic self. She keeps wandering alone and distancing herself from the others. She never tells anyone of her incidents or recounts her memories. This repression is also what intensifies her alienation, as a pariah victim.

Sorrow becomes an abandoned first after she loses her father and then when she is casted off by the sawyers' family. Before she finds refuge at Jacob Vaark's farm, Sorrow is sheltered by the Sawyers who found her on the shore. Unfortunately, Sorrow falls prey to rape at the hands of the Sawyers' boys. As a result of rape Sorrow becomes pregnant. Her tragic pregnancy impelled the sawyers to abandon and reject her like an animal. Sorrow was exposed to two horrible experiences in her life which caused her to be a pariah. At the Vaark's farm, due to her estrangement, Sorrow is put on the margin by both Lina and Rebekka. They suspected her pregnancy from Jacob and thus they marginalized her. Despite the fact that Jacob's home is inhabited by an array of people, Sorrow lives on the margin and feels lonely because no one wants to talk to her, neither Lina nor Rebekka. Sorrow is treated by both of them as an alien and is kept at a distance. She is mistrusted by Lina and is impeached to be "bad luck in the flesh" and a "natural curse", who "dragged misery like a tail" (91-94) Sorrow's dissociation at Jacob's farm is due in part by Lina. It is Lina who, as Jimenez Teresa G states, drives "a wedge between Sorrow and the rest of the residents" (10). Sorrow is excluded by Lina who warns Florens from being close to her, so "whenever Sorrow came near; Lina said 'scat', or sent her on some task that needed doing immediately, all the while making certain everyone else shared the distrust that sparkled in her own eyes" (227)

Sorrow is rejected like her newborn baby is rejected by Lina. As it is implied by Lina "Sorrow was pregnant and soon there would be another virgin birth and, perhaps, unfortunately this one would not die" (96) Sorrow is a pariah who gave birth to another pariah.

Florens

She is another pariah figure who experiences the trauma of abandonment in her life. It is her trauma that imposes on her the marginal status within community. As a slave, she is impelled to grow as an orphan and live as an outcast. She has been depicted by her mother as "the ill-shod child that the mother was throwing away"(57). Florens was a little girl at that time and could not understand her mother's deed. She often recalls her mother's rejection and feels deep sorrow for that. She is hurt by the memory of this abandonment which remains a traumatic wound within her psyche. She understands that her mother rejects her and gives her up from her life because the only one she cares for and loves her is her little boy. Even though she is filled with Lina's love and lives among other people in vaark's farm, she feels lonely.

Florens recognizes her pariah status when she goes in search for the blacksmith at the wilderness. She is traumatically afflicted with the strange gaze of the village' inhabitants. During her errand, Florens is exposed to rejection by the members of that community, because they believe she is a limb of the devil because of her black color. They forced her to take off her clothes and stay naked to be checked. At that moment, Florens is traumatized by their cruel reaction and strange gaze. They gave her the impression of being a strange creature. Being black, Florens is considered an evil and not a human being that's why she is rejected by the members of that community.

Florens is a pariah because life afflicted her with a sense of loss and abandonment. She is an orphan in the sense of having first been abandoned by her mother, as she thinks. Though Florens forges an emotional bond with Lina and feels a lot of affection for her, she still feels the void of her mother because she lives within the trauma of her mother's abandonment. She is also rejected by the blacksmith and later on she feels at a loss with the death of Jacob Vaark. It is noted by Cristina D'Imperio "the sense of abandonment repeats itself, not just at Jacob's death, but after Florens is rejected by a free blacksmith with whom she has an affair. Because Florens endures rejection in her infancy and is deprived of love, she becomes traumatically violent. As it stated by Barbara Schapiro "if the infant is traumatically frustrated in its first love relationship, if it fails to receive the affirmation and recognition it craves, the intense neediness of the infant's own love becomes dangerous and threatening" (197) Florens attempts to crave for this love with the Blacksmith, that's why she acts violently with the little boy Malaik. Her violence with Malaik impels the blacksmith to reject her and "repudiate her love" (Jimenez Teresa G 6) This rejection inflicts profound pain upon Florens and shatters her self, as she "is drawn back in memory and feeling, to the moment of her abandonment, when her mother chose her brother over her" (6) Like her mother, this blacksmith also rejects her and chooses a little boy in his care instead of her, and he tells Florens that she has made herself a slave because her "head is empty and [her] body is wild" and that she must "own herself" (256).

Lina

Lina is another pariah figure in *A Mercy*. She is a Native American who lives on the margin of the white community and who suffers a lot as an outcast. She survived the traumatic incident of small pox that "had wiped away her village" (75). She is the only survivor of this trauma. After this tragic incident, Lina finds herself alone like a pariah,

having a life of a wanderer. In the beginning, "she was taken to live among kindly Presbyterians" and finds refuge among them. (78) Feeling afraid of becoming an outcast once again and "afraid of once more losing shelter, terrified of being alone in the world without family", Lina "acknowledged her status as heathen"(79). Though Lina finds refuge among the Presbyterians, she is considered an outcast and is put on the margin because they would not permit her to accompany them to either of the Sunday services they attended"(80) Lina is an undesirable figure whom "neighbors call her---a praying savage" (4) Lina returns to her life of pariah after "the Presbyterians abandoned her without so much as a murmur of far well" (80) She is rejected by them because they do not want her to be part of them. Lina's errand and solitary life is ended with Jacob Vaark who bought her as a slave to work his farm. "Lina had been a tall fourteen- year-old when Sir bought her from the Presbyterians" (87) Lina fights her solitary life with nature. She finds consolation in nature. "She cawed with birds, chatted with plants, spoke to squirrels, sang to the cow and opened her mouth to rain." (81)

Conclusion

This chapter is devoted to the depiction and representation of the pariah figures in both *Beloved* and *A Mercy* by bringing to the foreground their traumatic experiences as the ultimate cause for their self-estrangement and social rejection. The characters' traumas are analyzed using trauma theory because it was the most suitable theoretical framework to be used in this research work.

This last chapter is divided into two main parts. The first part is devoted to the analysis of the characters' traumatic experiences in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. It discusses slavery as a historical trauma that gave rise to many other traumas. Three main traumas are discussed: the trauma of rape, trauma of abandonment and trauma of infanticide as they are portrayed by Toni Morrison in her two novels. Referring to trauma theory, I have compared between both

the characters and their traumatic incidents and showed how they are physically and psychologically affected and traumatized. Through the perspective offered by trauma theory, I have tried to bring to the foreground trauma as the ultimate cause for the characters' pariah status and dissociative self. The second part of this chapter deals with the representation of the pariah figures in *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. This last section portrays how the characters become pariahs and suffer from self-estrangement and social alienation. It proves how trauma inflicted the same fate on these characters by turning them to become pariahs. Having focused on the key element "dissociation" as it is illustrated by Michelle Balaev, We come with the conclusion that dissociation was the aftermath of these characters' traumatic experiences.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

Toni Morrison is an influential writer who devoted her literary works writing about the history of her people and identity. She wrote about American history in her most influential books *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. Through these works, she restored the forgotten history of slavery and unveiled the plight of the African Americans. In reading them, we find ourselves reading about the complete bleak history of slavery; Morrison succeeded to delve deeper in this watershed of American history through the pages of her fictions. Through the traumatic stories of her characters, Morrison depicted all the horrors, traumas and atrocities that the African Americans faced as slaves. In *Beloved* and *A Mercy*, we feel that Morrison's characters are real people with factual stories because she transformed story into history. That is to say, she fictionalized history and historicized fiction. To study the pariahs and their traumatic experiences during slavery, I have chosen Morrison's *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. In these novels, we found that the characters are grappling with their traumas that resulted from slavery and become as a result pariahs.

There is profound resemblance between *Beloved* and *A Mercy*. In my dissertation, I have tried to show the similarities that link them. In this research work, I have studied the text and context of the two novels. In the textual study, I tried to present the plot summary and setting of each novel and to discuss the two major themes that connect them: slavery and motherhood. Exploring the theme of slavery is of prominent importance in this dissertation because *Beloved* and *A Mercy* are both fictions about history. We discussed slavery as historical trauma and all the other traumatic experiences that resulted from it, like rape, infanticide and abandonment. In the contextual study, I have provided the biography of the author Toni Morrison to acknowledge her literary career since she is the first African American to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993. In the biography I have

focused on her personal life and also professional career, listing all her literary works and the awards she won that canonized her.

In this part, I have provided the historical background of the two works to prove that they are historical fictions dealing with the past and history. In another section, I have given a synopsis of trauma theory in which I included some influential works dealing with the theory to help explain the theory and allow its application. I have adopted this approach and analyzed the traumatic experiences of the characters; I have shown how these traumas caused the dissociation of these characters, turning them to become pariahs. I found that this theory was the most appropriate to use in answering the research questions. I have analyzed the characters' traumatic experiences and represented the pariah figures in the books through the application of this theory. In her fictions, Morrison showed that her characters were grappling with the same traumas and were affected and traumatized by the same physical and psychological injuries.

In exploring the traumas experienced by Morrison's characters and analyzing their effects on the physical and psychological levels, I have discovered that these trauma victims experienced the same effects and aftermath of their traumas. Each one of them suffered from psychic disorder and anxiety that had influenced their psychology and caused their dissociation. The characters who extremely suffered from post traumatic stress disorder were the ones who had endured sexual abuse like Sethe, Paul D and Sorrow. Through the analysis of traumatic experiences, I found that dissociation was the consequence of those characters' traumas. They became self-estranged and dissociated. As a result of their traumas, they suffered from disconnection between their thoughts, memories, feelings, actions, and also sense of who they are. Obviously, we may remark this in the characters of Sethe, Sorrow and Denver.

This dissertation is aiming at depicting the pariah status of the black figure in *Beloved* and *A Mercy* by drawing comparison between the two books' characters and their traumatic experiences. I have represented three characters of each novel; in *Beloved*, Sethe, Paul D and Denver, and in *A Mercy*: Florens, Sorrow and Lina. I made a relation between their traumas and their status as pariah, and showed how the previous terrible incidents they were exposed to affected their psyche and as a result caused their dissociative state. Upon examination of the characters' traumatic experiences with the use of trauma theory, I found that the two novels dealt with trauma and that trauma was the cause of the self-estrangement and dissociation of these pariah victims.

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