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PITANJA RASE U ODABRANIM ROMANIMA TONI MORRISON

Mentor: prof. dr. Ksenija Kondali

Student: Kadir Sućeska

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UNIVERSITY OF SARAJEVO- FACULTY OF PHILOSOPHY
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FINAL PAPER

ISSUES OF RACE IN SELECTED NOVELS OF TONI MORRISON

Mentor: prof. dr. Ksenija Kondali

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Sažetak

Fokus teme ovog rada će biti na tri romana afroameričke autorice Toni Morrison: „Najplavlje oko“ (*The Bluest Eye*) (2001), „Neka vrsta milosti“ (*A Mercy*) (2008) i „Dom“ (*Home*) (2013). Oslanjajući se na teorijsko-kritičku literaturu koja se bavi propitivanjem teme rasnih problema u američkom društvu, rad polazi od hipoteze da su ključni problemi i sukobi predstavljeni u odabranim romanima izazvani rasnom mržnjom te da proizilaze kao direktan rezultat višegeneracijskih posljedica institucionaliziranog rasizma. Glavninu rada čini propitivanje ključnih likova i trenutaka u odabranim romanima, te analize istih sa ciljem prikazivanja duboko ukorijenjenih problema izazvanih rasizmom koji u velikoj mjeri i danas postoje u američkom društvu. Završni rad je organizovan u četiri dijela: uvoda, tri dijela koja se bave analizom ključnih rasnih problema u tri predhodno spomenuta romana, i zaključka. Uvodni dio se bavi kratkim prikazom teme rasnih problema, načinom na koji će oni biti analizirani u radu, te kratkom biografijom autorice. Glavni dio se bavi detaljnijom analizom rasnih problema u svakom od pomenutih romana. Prvi roman koji će se obraditi je *The Bluest Eye* u kojem se predstavlja život u maloj zajednici u Americi, a radnja se odvija 1941. godine i prikazuje patnju nekoliko generacija Afroamerikanaca usljed nepripadanja institucionaliziranim standardima ljepote, a samim time i ljudskosti, te vrlo relevantne problem rasizma u Americi, pedofilije, seksualnog uznemiravanja i vršnjačkog nasilja. Radnja romana *A Mercy* (2008) smještena je u doba kolonijalne Amerike koja prepliće priče o rasnoj mržnji i trgovanja robljem sa sudbinom majke i kćeri u složenim kolonijalnim uvjetima rasnog zlostavljanja. Roman *Home* (2013) prati život Afroamerikanca, vojnog veterana koji se vraća kući na jug SAD-a iz Korejskog rata. Prikazom surove realnosti života Afroamerikanaca sredinom dvadesetog vijeka u rasno podijeljenom društvu američkog Juga, autorica opisuje posljedice posttraumatskog stresnog poremećaja, ali i diskriminaciju Afroamerikanki po višestrukim osnovama. Odabrani romani nude jezgrovit prikaz problema sa kojima se Afroamerička zajednica susreće, a ti isti problemi im sprječavaju mogućnost integriranja u maticu američkoga društva. Rad se završava isticanjem ključnih prikaza rasnih problema u odabranim romanima, kratkom refleksijom na njihov utjecaj na glavne likove tih romana, te osvrtanjem na važnost prevazilaženja rasizma i rasne mržnje u modernom društvu.

Ključne riječi: rasni problemi, rasizam, institucionalni rasizam, građanska prava, generacijska trauma

Abstract

The main focus of this thesis will be placed on three novels: *The Bluest Eye* (2001), *A Mercy* (2008) and *Home* (2013) written by Toni Morrison, an African American author. Relying on theoretical and critical literature that deals with questioning the topic of racial issues within the American society, this thesis starts from the hypothesis that the key problems and conflicts represented in the selected novels are caused by racial hatred and that they exist as a direct result of multigenerational consequences of institutionalised racism. The main body of the work is made up of questioning the key characters and moments of the selected novels and the analysis of the same, with the goal of presenting the deep-rooted problems caused by racism which exist to a great extent within the American society today. This thesis is made up of four parts: the introduction, three parts which deal with the analysis of key racial issues in the three aforementioned novels, and the conclusion. The introduction deals with the brief depiction of the topic of racial issues, the way in which it will be analysed in the thesis, and there is a brief biography of the author herself. The main part deals with the detailed analysis of racial issues in each of the aforementioned novels. The first novel to be analysed will be *The Bluest Eye* which deals with the presentation of life within a small American community, the story is set in 1941, and it depicts the suffering of several generations of African Americans in the wake of not belonging to institutionalized standards of beauty, and therefore humanity, the novel also deals with the very relevant problems of racism in America, paedophilia, sexual harassment and peer violence. The story of the novel *Mercy* (2008) is set in the age of colonial America, and it overlaps the stories of racial hatred and the slave trade with the fate of a mother and daughter within the complex colonial conditions of racial abuse. The novel *Home* follows the life of an African American army veteran who returns home to the American South from the Korean War. By depicting the raw reality of the lives of African Americans in the mid twentieth century, within the racially segregated American society of the South the author depicts the consequences both of the post-traumatic stress disorder as well as the discrimination of African American women along multiple lines. The selected novels offer a concise depiction of problems facing the African American community, and those same problems are preventing them from the possibility of reintegration within the mainstream of the American society. The thesis concludes by highlighting key depictions of racial issues in the selected novels, a brief reflection on their influence upon the main characters of those novels, and by looking back on the importance of overcoming racism and racial hatred within the modern society.

Keywords: racial issues, racism, institutionalised racism, civil rights, generational trauma

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1) Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to analyse the characters and plots of the source texts of Toni Morrison's seminal novels *The Bluest Eye*, *Home*, and *A Mercy*, focusing predominantly on the racial issues raised by the author. This analysis of the source texts will be conducted mainly through the examination of the author's thematic scope as encountered within her oeuvre, with specific focus being placed on the aforementioned main texts of this paper. This approach will emphasize the interpretation of characters' mental and emotional states, observed in states of great psychological distress and profoundly stressful situations caused, and compounded by racism within an essentially hostile and uncaring environment. This analytic approach will also focus on the narrator's point of view, and the interpretation of some potent symbols, imagery, and situations in which the characters find themselves. This type of analysis allows for special examination of implications of the tone, linguistic patterns and word usage of the author. Due to the nature of the source texts, what with the majority of them featuring female protagonists and characters, some attention will also be placed on the feminist analytical approach. This will be done in order to consider the source texts through the prism of women's experience, along with the consideration of factors relating to how the characters featured in the source texts, the events that happen to and around them, their decisions and their lives impact the world of prescribed gender roles. Ultimately, the main focus of this thesis will be placed upon the examination of the author's portrayal of issues caused by the long and ugly history of racial inequality and hatred found within the American society. The issues of race and problematic racial dynamics which constitute a crucial part of the selected novels this thesis shall be analysing are going to be approached through the examination of certain main and supporting characters depicted in the novels. This will be done mainly because it is through the actions of these characters, their interactions with their environments, the other characters, and even with themselves, that one is provided with a profound and fundamental insight into the crux of the issues of race and toxic racial relations the examination of which constitutes the main topic of this thesis. In order to examine the crux of these issues found within the source texts, the focus of analysis will be placed on the social and economic factors which seem to form the perfect "breeding ground" for the creation of conflict and strife within the American society. It must also be mentioned that, as this thesis will illustrate at a later point, the aforementioned racial issues that will be examined do not always specifically have to signify issues observed between two different racial groups,

but rather issues that can arise within one particular racial group as a direct result of years of racial violence and bigotry. Before proceeding with the main body of this thesis, I feel it is necessary to briefly introduce the author of the source texts. The majority of information used to write this brief biographical section was sourced from the National Women's History Museum's website, featuring a dedicated article on Morrison's life and achievements written by Kerri Lee Alexander. Toni Morrison, whose original name was actually Chloe Anthony Wofford, is one of the most celebrated and critically acclaimed authors of the English-speaking world. She was born in the U.S., in a town called Lorain located in the state of Ohio on February 18th, 1931. Morrison grew up in the part of the U.S. traditionally referred to as the Midwest. Her exposure to the art of storytelling occurred at a very young age what with her family possessing an avid appreciation for songs and folktales which were, and still are, a famous part of the vibrant African American community. An enthusiastic scholar, Morrison attended Howard University, where she received her B.A. in English in 1953, and Cornell University, where she received her M.A. in English in 1955. She began teaching English at Texas Southern University, but after two years returned to Howard University as a professor, where she worked from 1957 to 1964. In 1965, Morrison started work as a fiction editor at the publishing house called "Random House". She began teaching writing at the State University of New York at Albany in 1984, joined the faculty of Princeton University in 1989, and retired in 2006. Toni Morrison's literary work very much reflected her own life experience. She is celebrated for her examination of Black experience, especially Black female experience, within the African American community. Her life was as much a part of her work as vice versa, "Although she grew up in a semi-integrated area, racial discrimination was a constant threat. When Morrison was two years old, the owner of her family's apartment building set their home on fire while they were inside because they were unable to afford the rent" (Alexander). Some of Morrison's most famous works are *The Bluest Eye* (1970), which was her first published novel, *Song of Solomon* (1977) which brought her national attention and won the National Book Critics Circle Award, and *Beloved* (1987), for which Morrison received the Pulitzer Prize. In 2010, Morrison was made an officer of the French Legion of Honour, and two years later she was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom from President Barack Obama. Toni Morrison's unique portrayal of an unjust society, of struggle and cultural identity merited no less than the Nobel Prize in Literature which she received in 1993 as

the first African American woman to receive such an honour, she inspired a generation of writers to follow in her footsteps.

2.1) Bondage, Othering, and Destruction of the Self in *A Mercy*

The novel bearing the title *A Mercy* was published in 2008 and is Toni Morrison's ninth novel. It made the New York Times Book Review list of "10 Best Books of 2008". *A Mercy* features a deeply poignant and interesting story about people and their lives amid the ever more popular slave trade in the burgeoning colonies of the New World. The plot revolves around several well-rounded characters who are all on a quest to find a place for themselves in a new world of seemingly limitless possibility. The plot follows the lives of all these characters concurrently, the narrative shifts from one of them to another, each taking their turn in the role of the narrator.

The story kicks off by following Jacob Vaark, a farmer and trader from New England, who goes to Maryland to settle a debt with the plantation owner and slave trader D'Ortega. As stated by a critic, "Of the characters in *A Mercy*, Jacob Vaark, Florens' new master, best represents the nascent American spirit of adventure and self-reliance, while his egalitarian ethos enables him to create a household modelling harmonious relations between the races represented in the colonies" (Bellamy 18). D'Ortega offers Jacob any slave he wants as compensation for his debt, and although Jacob dislikes slavery, he accepts a female slave, Florens's mother. But Florens's mother, wanting to save her daughter from the lifetime of sexual abuse and rape she herself has suffered at the hands of D'Ortega, begs Jacob to take her daughter instead. Jacob agrees, and D'Ortega arranges to have Florens sent to New England. At this time, Jacob finds himself increasingly devoting more thought to the opulence which men like D'Ortega seem in some way destined to amass through business. Even though he is profoundly disgusted by the way in which D'Ortega made his fortune, i.e. the slave trade, Jacob still develops the desire for wealth and lavishness, like the one he witnessed at D'Ortega's. He decides to invest more in the sugar cane industry in order to make enough money to build a house like that of his own. At the Vaark farm, Florens meets Jacob's wife Rebekka and their servants Lina and Sorrow. Jacob begins to amass wealth thanks to his investments, and eventually sets about constructing a lavish house, much like D'Ortega's, and he summons labourers from all over to come to help build it, including the

indentured servants from the next farm over, Willard and Scully. Jacob also commissions an iron fence, bringing in a blacksmith to make it for him. Florens falls in love with the Blacksmith, who is a free African man, and they strike up a romantic relationship. Eventually, Jacob dies of smallpox, his wife Rebekka also contracts smallpox but manages to survive, and their farm has grown wild during the time it was left unattended. In the meantime, Florens was sent to fetch the Blacksmith, who was possibly the only man who could have healed Rebekka. On this journey, Florens goes through many trials and tribulations. After a wagon ride and a terrifying night in the woods, she is accused of being a devil because of her dark skin. She eventually manages to find the Blacksmith, but she also finds the Blacksmith's adopted son, who eventually drives a wedge between Florens and her beloved. Their romance ends with Florens being driven to the brink of insanity. Eventually, Florens makes her way back to the Vaark farm and along with Rebekka, Lina and Sorrow, she carries on with her life, never truly understanding the reason behind her mother's act of mercy. With that, the story of this novel ends.

The main topic with which this thesis will deal with regard to this summary of the novel's plot will be the issues portrayed within the lives of its characters, arising predominantly because of the deeply toxic and destructive race relations and race related conflicts. Characters such as Jacob, Rebecca, D'Ortega, Blacksmith, Florens, her mother and others all find themselves mired in some form of conflict during the story of the novel, ranging from something we would describe as microaggressions, verbal abuse, and societal alienation and marginalization, to physical and sexual violence. The portrayal of these problems, their impact on the character's physical and psychological health, as well as their race-based causes will be the main subject of this thesis.

This rather brief summarization of this fascinating novel indicates the centrality of racial issues which will be examined throughout this thesis. In order to do this, each major character of the novel will be placed into the spotlight, their personalities, and the ways these characters influenced other characters and the plot shall be examined, this shall be done in order to analyse the truly intense, sometimes overtly sinister and highly individual nature of racial oppression Morrison portrayed in this novel. Jacob Vaark is one of the first characters introduced to the reader in this novel. At first, he appears to be an overall "positive" character, meaning that his moral fibre seems to be intact. He seems fully capable of deducing right from wrong, and shows

a high degree of contempt towards that disgusting business which was the slave trade. Jacob is supposed to represent the kind of people thought to have made the U.S. the greatest country in the world. As a critic notes,

Morrison makes [...] Jacob Vaark a complex character, rather than the stereotypically brutal slave owner one might expect of the slave narrative tradition. In fact, Morrison makes clear that “flesh was not his commodity” (*A Mercy* 22). A man interested in travel more than in farming or managing a plantation, Vaark finds himself participating reluctantly in that culture despite himself. (Melton 2013, 40)

He is an immigrant, a businessman, an entrepreneur, a man who does not shy away from honest labour in order to earn his daily bread, and a man who is set in his conviction that nothing in this world is free, and people must earn their share through the sweat of their own brow. He appears to detest the corrupt elites, in the novel represented by men like D’Ortega, who have grown used to decadence and a lifestyle that has so fundamentally blunted their very sense of humanity. D’Ortega and his ilk think nothing of selling people as property, of abusing in the cruellest of ways those who they see as “beneath” them. Jacob shows much more awareness of the true, chaotic nature of things in 17th-century New England. He represents a truly original character for the very reason that he is able to see things as they truly are, rather than being indoctrinated into a racist colonial narrative like so many of his countrymen. Jacob fully understands that the very reason behind his newfound success in the New World is actually mired in a deep and profound injustice. He thinks about all the ways he could most efficiently turn a profit, but he also fully acknowledges that the easiest way to do so would be “on the backs” of slaves and through other means of oppression like exploiting cheap labour and other such transparently inhuman tactics. Undeniably, Jacob’s own background heavily influenced the way he perceives the world. Being “on the receiving end” of discrimination himself, he is not blind to the plights of the downtrodden, of those deemed “unnecessary” or “unwanted”. He is presented as a man who is always ready to give anybody a fair chance in life and as a man who does not judge people by the colour of their skin but by the nature of their character. Far from being a perfect character and human being, however, Jacob is still a man of his age, so to speak, and suffers from deeply rooted insecurities and a need to prove himself in a hard and hostile world. He is always on the

lookout for profit; he sees wealth as the only means of establishing himself, of making a name for himself. In this aspect, he is deeply impressed by D'Ortega, and his opulent manor, as portrayed by the author:

Two wide windows, at least two dozen panes in each, flanked the door. Five more windows on a broad second story held sunlight glittering above the mist. He had never seen a house like it. The wealthiest men he knew built in wood, not brick, riven clapboards with no need for grand pillars suitable for a House of Parliament. (Morrison 2008, 19)

During his business visit to D'Ortega, we are introduced to the darker side of Vaark's character. While being thoroughly impressed by the manor, he shows deep content for his host, the slaver D'Ortega. Jacob is distrustful of D'Ortega first and foremost because of D'Ortega's Catholic heritage, as stated by the author:

Does he cut his losses and let his ship sail on to Barbados? No, thought Jacob. A sloven man, stubborn in his wrongheadedness like all of the Roman faith, he waits in port for another month for a phantom ship from Lisbon carrying enough cargo to replenish the heads he has lost. (Morrison 2008, 20)

Here we are able to observe, however minute or overlooked, prejudice on Jacob's side. He harbours some irrational animosity or even borderline hatred towards this man without ever meeting him in the first place. This is a result, no doubt, of an age of hostility between the Protestants, Jacob's own denomination, and Catholics, represented by the greedy, vacuous and callous D'Ortega. During the meeting of these two men, an event transpires that is critical for the further examination of racial issues within this novel. While Jacob is most definitely presented as by and large opposed to the disgusting and inhuman nature of the slave trade, he is by no means immune to the temptations of material wealth such an abhorrent profession provides.

We go on to witness Vaark's moral collapse, however – a downfall of which the boastful, amoral promoter of the Barbadian slave/sugar/rum economy, Peter Downes,

is the catalyst. Jacob's solitary walk out to the beach and his washing of "the faint trace of coon's blood" in the waves symbolize his conversion to a conscienceless pursuit of slave-dependent wealth. (Roynon 2013, 83)

The extremely important episode at D'Ortega's manor could rightly be called a watershed moment in which Jacob's character buckles underneath his buried feelings of insecurity, ambition, and resentment. Whereas he was initially disgusted by D'Ortega's pomp and the very idea of slavery, he goes on to marry these two concepts in his head through a process of rationalization. Florens, along with other "labourers" on his estate, Jacob considers as little more than children, thoroughly unable to look after themselves without the aid of people like him and his wife Rebekka. While Jacob is fully able and more than happy to acknowledge the proverbial evil behind the slave trade and condemn the people responsible for its creation and proliferation like D'Ortega, he comes to the conclusion that slavery, or some more subsidiary version of it, is essentially a necessary evil so that those "righteous" men like him could triumph over their foes and ultimately make the world more like the one in their heads which will, somehow, be beneficial for all. It becomes painfully evident that Jacob as a character actually represents a brilliantly subtle jab at the perceived and very often glorified image of the early U.S. and the people that helped create it. Morrison presents these "founding fathers" in a new, quite unflattering light. Charles Tedder put it best stating the following: "A *Mercy* is, moreover, a novel of many unremarked lives, lives that were not marked down in the "pages of history" in the way that the biographies of the founding fathers were fashioned into a kind of hagiography" (Tedder 157). They are not these stoic, educated and unexpectedly moral people for their time. They are in fact presented as opportunistic and predatory, patronizing, and overtly hostile individuals who sought to propagate their own personal beliefs and views pertaining to what they believed the world should be like. In this light, Tedder observes:

Thus, Morrison's novel complicates a normative vision of the land of the free. Although some who came there were visionaries and schemers, there was never a grand liberal design uniting everyone as "colonists," let alone "founding fathers." This early America is not even "America" in a national sense—there is no representation of unified, inevitable progression toward

the Declaration of Independence, or any such “historical” event. (Tedder 2013, 157)

Through rigorous processes of mental gymnastics the aforementioned colonists rationalized and condoned invasions, genocides, displacements, religious persecutions, racial bigotry, and gender discrimination as tools used for the creation of the world “as it should be,” purely within the confines of their own limited and violence prone imagination. Here we are able to catch a glint of one of Morrison’s most famous and unique writing tropes, known within this author’s oeuvre as “rememory”. Regarding the topic of Morrison’s “rememory” Venetria K. Patton asserts:

Perhaps it is not enough to merely remember; one must remember differently. Hirsch contends that Morrison’s rememory is a maternal memory, which can offer resistance and opposition. She defines rememory as “memory combined with the threat of repetition; it is neither noun nor verb, but both combined.”... Thus Morrison’s text is not seeking to document a repressed history of slavery, but to create ruptures and gaps in society’s cultural amnesia. (Patton 2000, 123)

It is a way for the past to be reinterpreted, rethought and recovered. The introduction and discussion of Morrison’s concept of “rememory” within this thesis serves to build on the aforementioned examination of the novels’ characters and focus the discussion on the analysis of profoundly destructive, inhuman, and often overlooked racial issues depicted in the chosen novels. These issues very much hinge on human interaction, meaning interaction between the characters, verbal or otherwise. Given the historical nature, or settings, of the novels interactions between characters could be somewhat obscured to the readers who could themselves be deluded by some preconceptions regarding the true nature of social interactions of the time periods introduced within the novels, no doubt “implanted” by popular silver screen depictions of these “golden times” by Hollywood. Using “rememory” Morrison shatters these preconceptions by introducing and presenting human and interracial everyday interactions in a very realistic, sometimes even naturalistic light, thereby depicting these times, places, and people in a “warts and all” manner, never shying away from presenting the highest highs of human virtue and the lowest lows of human hatred, depravity and vice. Going further beyond the “official” version of history, Morrison re-examines the past through the people that made it happen. She populates

historical times, events, and places with normal everyday common people, people characterized with personality traits, virtues, and vices that are insusceptible to the relentless march of time. Thus, what we might call “historical” characters in Morrison’s novels are every bit as much “human” as any character placed within the modern timeframe. Jacob Vaark, a noble pioneer, a settler, a benevolent Christian, was also a slave owner and slave labour profiteer; he died in a mansion built on the backs of slaves. Regarding this depiction of Jacob as Morrison’s prototype of a “founding father” a critic states:

Although some historians would argue against being more noticeable as the sole quality constituting the difference in the situation of white and non-white indentured servants, Morrison proves her point by populating her narrative with a variety of characters that are deprived of personal liberty on a variety of grounds. One would clearly notice that Jacob Vaark’s extended family could be a subtle metaphor for representing colonial America – a house – that benefitted the most from slavery. Vaark’s family is built based upon fault lines wherein, each member of it was bartered in a crudely benign manner. (Thounaojam 2013, 172)

It would be no stretch of imagination to consider the Vaark household Morrison’s representation of the colonies that would eventually become the United States, an ambitious undertaking fuelled by righteous fervour, yet ultimately so essentially flawed due to its creation on the back of slaves, those who were so fundamentally oppressed so as not to have a say in its creation, and those who, following the ultimate destruction of their oppressors, would come to inherit and eventually build up the house that was left behind. Lina, Vaark’s Native American servant, was presented to be especially apathetic towards the unnecessarily large monstrosity of a house Jacob was so hell bent on creating:

Lina was unimpressed by the festive mood, the jittery satisfaction of everyone involved, and had refused to enter or go near it. That third and presumably final house that Sir insisted on building distorted sunlight and required the death of fifty trees. And now having died in it he will haunt its rooms forever. (Morrison 2008, 42)

As this quote from *A Mercy* demonstrates, Lina saw the creation of the house for what it truly was, a profound act of destruction and warping of nature into something fundamentally unnatural and malevolent. The presence of the house priced and shattered the earth, destroyed the surrounding woodland and twisted the very sunlight around it. It represented an ultimate antithesis to how her people had lived on that very same land for countless generations. Jacobs's death and his subsequent haunting of the house merely completed this process of defilement. What was left behind was a festering sore on the face of the landscape, a place devoid of any manner of life or happiness, where no humans would dare venture. Here we are able to catch a glimmer of Morrison's interpretation of the seizing of Native American land and rather than it being used to create the U.S. we know today, it is represented as being stolen, defiled, and ultimately squandered simply because of one man's avarice. Rebekka, Jacob's wife, and, following his death, the owner of the Vaark estate represents the other half of Morrison's "pioneer poster family". Rebekka is a fascinating character within the scope of this novel because she is very much Morrison's representation of a proto-New Woman, a concept that would emerge and become prevalent during the late 19th century.

Through Rebekka, the mail order bride who welcomes escape from the poverty, stench, and ubiquitous violence of her London life, we encounter the author's first ever fictional representation of England. Morrison's picture completely subverts WASP Anglophilia, and through the specific experience of this woman she explores a sentiment common to millions of immigrants to the American continent: "America. Whatever the danger, how could it possibly be worse?" (Roynon 2013, 83)

She is no stranger to the harshness of life, as observed in her "lower" class socio-economic background, she is essentially "sold off" by her father who, no doubt, saw no practical use for her, who could not find any immediate way to turn a profit from her, and who had no use for another mouth to feed, so he sent her literally to the other side of the world, to the highest bidder. And yet, in spite of this, she does everything in her power to separate herself and her husband from all those people she deems to be in some way or another different or even "lesser". When considering the significance of the examination of Rebekka as a character within the scope of the topic of this thesis it would be unfortunate to gloss over, or fail to mention, the racial issues that

arise between Rebekka and the other female “servants” of the Vaark household. While being presented as somewhat of a “modern” woman, Rebekka is certainly not immune to the inherited societal prejudices of her time. She is described as a devoutly religious person, a Protestant Christian, and her religious zeal only grows over time. The mainstream Christian religion and its offshoots of that time did not really know how to “classify” non-white or indigenous peoples and converts.

A praying savage, neighbors call her, because she [Lina] is once churchgoing yet she bathes herself every day and Christians never do. Underneath she wears bright blue beads and dances in secret at first light when the moon is small....The Anabaptists were not confused about any of this. Adam (like Jacob) was a good man but (unlike Jacob) he had been goaded and undermined by his mate. They understood, also, that there were lines of acceptable behavior and righteous thought. Levels of sin, in other words, and lesser peoples. Natives and Africans, for instance, had access to grace but not to heaven—a heaven they knew as intimately as they knew their own gardens. (Morrison 2008, 11, 90)

By and large their conversion to Christianity was expected, forced, and more than welcomed. This, however, did not put them on the same religious hierarchical level as European Christians who inherited the religion through their lineage. Therefore Rebekka never truly considered converts like Lina, a Native American, or Florens, an African, her equals, religious or otherwise, and was subsequently more than happy, at times, to mistreat and demean them. As a critic puts it:

Institutional religion shapes Rebekka’s experience at this point, and as a consequence we come across a deep belief in the superiority of the Europeans and the solidification of social hierarchies. The elements that compose Americanness, which were already present since the beginning, started to take hegemonic shapes, and the slave industry started to look like the one we became familiar with. (Cholant 2016, 12)

Rebekka embraces the role of “mistress” with a considerable degree of vigour. She takes it upon herself to “civilize” Lina, Florens, and Sorrow. She does this by completely destroying any

semblance of heritage these characters might have possessed or manifested using methods such as corporal punishment or public shaming. She actively tries to “pacify” the “savage side” of these characters, breaking them down, but never truly building them back up again. As described in the novel:

She turns to Sorrow and slaps her face more, saying Fool... I think Mistress says other words to her, softer ones, but I am only seeing how her eyes go. Their look is close to the way of the women who stare at Lina and me as we wait for the Ney brothers. Neither look scares, but it is a hurting thing.... her eyes are nowhere and have no inside. Like the eyes of the women who examine me behind the closet door, Mistress' eyes only look out and what she is seeing is not to her liking.... She makes us all, Lina, Sorrow, Sorrow's daughter and me, no matter the weather, sleep either in the cowshed or the storeroom where bricks rope tools all manner of building waste are.... Worse is how Mistress is to Lina. She requires her company on the way to church but sits her by the road in all weather because she cannot enter. (Morrison 2008, 64, 139, 140)

These three characters are essential when considering the topic of racial issues within this novel. Starting from Lina who is a young Native American woman whose closest family was decimated by smallpox, and who was then mistreated in various ways by the European settlers before eventually being bought by Jacob Vaark to work on his farm as a servant. Lina is very much an avatar for the Native American people who suffered greatly at the hands of the European settlers even before the times described in *A Mercy*. They were driven from their homes on the east coast of the North American continent and pushed westward in order to make way for the incoming tide of settlers from Europe. Through Lina, Morrison depicts the plight of an entire race of people who so often get ignored when recounting the history of the earliest years of the U.S.

During and after that contest, there had never been much point in knowing who claimed this or that terrain; this or another outpost. Other than certain natives, to whom it all belonged, from one year to another any stretch might be claimed by a

church, controlled by a Company or become the private property of a royal's gift to a son or a favourite. (Morrison 2008, 16)

Thus Lina becomes a multifaceted prism through which a number of great injustices and modes of oppression are presented to the reader in a profoundly intimate and personal way. As Morrison points out, Lina becomes fully aware and intimately acquainted with the wily, corrupt and wasteful ways of the Europeans, "Lina says Sir has a clever way of getting without giving" (12). Through Lina the instability and the eventual fall of such a destructive way of life is foreshadowed as stated in the novel:

"The first house Sir built—dirt floor, green wood—was weaker than the bark covered one she herself was born in. The second one was strong. . . . There was no need for a third. Yet at the very moment when there were no children to occupy or inherit it, he meant to build another, bigger, double-storied, fenced and gated. . . . [H]e decided to kill the trees and replace them with a profane monument to himself. . . . Killing trees in that number, without asking their permission, of course his efforts would stir up malfortune". (Morrison 2008, 42-43)

Lina found herself completely alone, subsequently raped and converted to a foreign religion. She was then sold and encumbered by tasks of great responsibility, purely because she was deemed capable on the base of her heritage. Her identity was the first thing to be targeted and destroyed. In place of it, a new one was attempted to be imposed, with unexpected results, as a critic puts it:

The destructive effect of a narrow-minded divinity is also evoked through Lina. The loss of her family and people is characterized by Europeans as "God's wrath toward the idle and profane" (47). In the Europeans' efforts to convert her, they upend her world view: "She learned that bathing naked in the river was a sin; that plucking cherries from a tree burdened with them was theft; that to eat corn mush with one's fingers was perverse. That God hated idleness most of all, so staring off into space to weep for a mother or a playmate was to court damnation" (47-48). As antidote, Lina

does what many of the oppressed have done; she creates her own syncretic theology.
(Babb 2011, 157)

Morrison creates the character of Lina as the ultimate survivor. Throughout the novel, Lina is always looked at as the level-headed one, the one who would always provide sage advice and know the right course to take in any given situation. This, of course, goes much further beyond the simple fact that being Native American, Lina possesses the knowledge needed to survive in the wilderness. Lina is also presented as a profoundly benevolent woman, one who, in spite of all the horrific things that happened to her at a disturbingly young age, still feels empathy towards these clearly misguided and severely self-destructive people. This being said, the destructive influence of the white settlers had profoundly wounded Lina's character and forced her into having to "get creative" in order to survive. The first settlers that had a major influence on Lina were the Presbyterians, who played a major part in shaping Lina's opinion on white settlers. The Presbyterians originally christened her Messalina, a name that invokes visions of a powerful and influential, and also highly promiscuous woman. This is, no doubt, tied to the fact that the Europeans saw the Native American way of life as being savage and essentially sinful due to their lack of self-conscious shame. The Presbyterians did all they could to instil the feeling of shame into Lina, in order to teach her Christian modesty, and they were quite happy with the fact that Lina did not really like the company of other Native American men. Lina used these fixations in order to create an artificial persona for herself, one of a modest, hard-working, virtuous, even borderline prudish woman. This was done simply as a way to survive an attack from an unknown and insidiously hostile enemy. Despite this chameleonic act, however, Lina still held on to some of her people's traditions, never really forgetting her people's heritage, as noted by Gonçalo Cholant, who underscores her altering relation to and perception of the white people represented by Vaark and the Presbyterians who took her up when her village faced extinction, noting also the gendered respect they granted her:

"[t]hey were pleased to have her, they said, because they admired native women who, they said, worked as hard as they themselves did, but scorned native men who simply fished and hunted like gentry all day" (Morrison 47). Lina's labour is valued in the

European project, in opposition to her male counterparts. She used assimilation as a strategy of survival, yet secretly keeping some of her traditions. (Cholant 2016, 11)

Prior to her arrival on Jacob Vaark's estate, Lina had been pretty much abandoned by the Presbyterians, who had decided to sell her as property. "When raped, Lina is taken in and subsequently abandoned by Presbyterians, who deem her conversion a failure. They advertise her as a "hardy female, Christianized and capable. . . available for exchange of goods or specie" (52), and thus she is sold to Vaark" (Babb, 156). Here Morrison clearly shows the way Native Americans were actually treated by the so-called moral and religious Europeans. Lina is advertised as little more than cattle, or a tool, good for making the settlers' lives more convenient or easy. The part of the advert focusing on the fact that she had been "Christianized" is an important addition on Morrison's part. This is meant to put the prospective buyers at ease, and signal the fact that this "savage" had been "broken in" so to speak, it is there to signal the fact that this person had been made docile and taught to respect and fear their European betters. At some point, Lina becomes all too familiar with this concept, hence her creation of her new "Christianized" persona, enabling Lina to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with Rebekka, her newest European mistress. Rebekka, adamant in her desire to prosper in this unknown land, desperately needs Lina and comes to rely heavily on her advice and help. Here we are able to observe something of a "perfect storm" of cooperation between these two women of wildly different backgrounds. Rebekka, while considering herself as a white woman superior to Lina is not above heavily relying on Lina's help in virtually all facets of frontier life, and for her part, Lina is willing to help this woman who would no doubt perish without her and who is willing to acknowledge this fact and treat Lina with some shred of decency, humanity, and respect she deserves, as a critic notes:

Lina reconstructs her universe syncretically combining her traditional knowledge with the European, recreating culture in order to function and to survive in America at that point. Her relation with Rebekka reveals once again the fluidity of this land, since submission of female subjects was expected from the beginning. Still, they forge an alliance to be able to live in the interstice: Lina needs to learn how to survive a world

commanded by whites, while Rebekka needs to learn how to work the land so she can prosper. (Cholant 2016, 11)

This kind of multi-ethnic alliance Morrison creates in the novel would most likely have been extremely difficult to form through the barriers that existed between the white European settlers and people like Lina, Sorrow or Florens. This unorthodox “family unit” is deeply disturbed by Jacob Vaark’s death. Unable to cope with the loss of her husband and the near loss of her own life as well, Rebekka becomes ever more obsessed with the dogmatic nature of the Protestant religion and in doing so grows ever more tyrannical towards her servants, especially Lina, as noted by a critic:

Protestantism guides her thinking and she exerts her colonial power to completely dominate Lina, trying to erase from her life any trace of her traditional culture. As an example, she removes the hammock where Lina liked to sleep, as well as forbids her from bathing naked in the river. The result of these actions is Lina’s exile. (Cholant 2016, 11)

Lina can rightly be understood as a thoroughly pragmatic and practical character. After facing many trials and tribulations, she always tends to find the best way to survive a difficult and dangerous situation. And yet despite all of this, as mentioned before, she still retains her “human side,” she still finds room for empathy, understanding, and even love. This is best reflected in Lina’s motherly relationship with Florens. It would go without saying that Lina definitely saw some of herself in Florens, a young girl ripped away from her family, traded as livestock, expected to perform difficult, dangerous and sometimes even inhuman tasks for her white masters. This motherly love towards Florens also has a darker side, however, one that is revealed within Lina’s relationship towards Sorrow, another servant at the Vaark farm. Sorrow is one of the most mysterious characters in the novel. It is heavily implied that Sorrow was a girl of mixed race. She is discovered completely alone, half drowned on a beach. She is thought to have been a ship captain’s daughter and the only survivor of a shipwreck.

All people were gone or drowned and she might have been too had she not been deep in an opium sleep in the ship's surgery. Taken there to have the boils removed from her neck, she drank the mixture the surgeon said would cut off the pain. So when the ship foundered she did not know it, and if any unmurdered hands and passengers escaped, she didn't know that either. What she remembered was waking up after falling to the floor under the hammock all alone. Captain, her father, nowhere. (Morrison 2008, 105)

Because of her prolonged isolation, she grows to trust other people too much, which leads her to become a victim of sexual violence and exploitation on at least two occasions. None of the characters ever really comes to know Sorrow, and she, as a character, is very much abandoned or misunderstood at best or abused and mistreated at worst. Another character tied to Sorrow is Twin, an entity no other character is able to see, and one of the few friends Sorrow has. Twin seems to always be there for Sorrow, and provides her with someone to talk to and someone to guide her and offer her advice. Due to Twin's ethereal nature, it becomes painfully evident that the character referred to as "Twin" is actually a fabrication of Sorrow's mind. "Twin" is actually a coping mechanism, fabricated by Sorrow's mind as a countermeasure against the cruelty and mistreatment she experiences from the world around her. Here we are able to experience Morrison's intimate and rather disturbing representation of mental illness, as Cholant puts it:

Sorrow, the remaining element in the alleged family, had been brought in by Vaark, and certainly is the odd component in a house filled with productive women: "To Mistress she was useless. To Lina she was bad luck in the flesh" (Morrison 53). Lina distrusted the white girl, even considering her to be responsible for the deaths of Rebekka's children. Sorrow was not fit for rural life, and her only skill was sewing. She lost her memory after the shipwreck, and did not know where she was from. She had glimpses of the life in the ship, with hints of a history of sexual violence. (Cholant 2016, 11)

Through the character of Sorrow, Morrison provokes an examination of a deeply marginalized section of society to this very day. It is necessary to mention the fact that during the novel's time

period, women such as Sorrow were at risk not only of mere marginalization, but rather of actual persecution and even murder. The witch hunts, so popular during the 17th and even 18th centuries, primarily focused on the eradication of those individuals who fit the description of someone like Sorrow. Women, especially older widowed women who had sole ownership of property, women exhibiting signs of mental illness, and women who did not enjoy “protection” by male family members, found themselves at serious risk of being branded witches and outright murdered. While Sorrow is, luckily, spared this gruesome fate, we are able to glimpse another aspect of this societal and religious evil, as:

Both Lina's and Sorrow's violations by religious members of the community condemn not only the abuse of women, but also religious hypocrisy, and through this condemnation Morrison interrogates another key element of American origins narratives: the rationale of religious mission. The foundation of many prenational narratives is the image of worthy pilgrims seeking the freedom to worship as they see fit.⁵ The novel portrays the theological ideology that evolved in English settlements as intolerant, however, forgetful of the past sufferings of its own practitioners. Convinced of its own correctness, it defined the elect in the narrowest of terms and extended Christian compassion. (Babb 2011, 151)

Sorrow also introduces another dimension to the novel's concept of motherhood. Throughout the novel, Sorrow was abused in a variety of ways, one of the most inhuman and noticeable of all was the sexual variety. What with being of mixed race, Sorrow very much found herself at the mercy of other white male settlers who seemed to take great pleasure in taking advantage not only of the fact that Sorrow was of a mixed racial background, but also because she had no family and was evidently “different” i.e. showed signs of mental illness. Due to these factors, Sorrow found herself pregnant more than once, the first time before Jacob Vaark took her in as a servant out of pity, and the second time while being in employ at the Vaark farm. What is characteristic about Sorrow's first pregnancy was the fact that it was clearly a result of sexual violence and racial exploitation of the most inhuman nature. Sorrow's age during the time of this first pregnancy only compounds the severity of the heinous crime perpetrated against her. What is also interesting to mention would be the fact that it was Lina, a fellow “servant” who helped

Sorrow deliver her first baby. Lina told Sorrow that the baby was stillborn, but Sorrow seemed to instinctively know that that was in fact a lie. Sorrow's second pregnancy was much more constructive for Sorrow as a person. Upon delivering her second baby herself, Sorrow seemed to find some way of centring herself and becoming "in tune" with the world around her. As a consequence of her "grounding" she lost connection with Twin, who we now understand to be a fabrication of her imagination in order to cope with the terrible things being done to her. Sorrow's newly acquired motherhood served to complete her as a person. Due to this, she had decided to change her name to Complete.

The last, and certainly not the least, character of this novel to be analysed will be Florens, who could rightly be regarded as the main character, a key narrator of the story, and a pivot for the examination of the topic of this thesis. The reason as to why this protagonist is discussed now, after analysing a number of other characters, is precisely because of Florens' importance both in the scope of this thesis and the novel itself. She is the voice that tells the history to anyone who will hear; furthermore, she is the author's mouthpiece retelling and describing this particular time in American history from such a unique point of view and using such a distinctive language which becomes a blend of Portuguese, and Pidgin English. This singular blend gives her voice the power to express the inexpressible, to endow mundane actions a deeper meaning, and to introduce new information which would be completely omitted if uttered in "proper" English. Thus, she provides the reader with a new perspective, one that is fundamental for the purpose of exploring the topic of this thesis, as described in the novel:

Lina says there are some spirits who look after warriors and hunters and there are others who guard virgins and mothers. I am none of those. Reverend Father says communion is the best hope, prayer the next. There is no communion hereabouts and I feel shame to speak to the Virgin when all I am asking for is not to her liking. . . . We wait while Mistress does the selling talk. Sorrow jumps down and goes behind the trader's post where a village woman slaps her face many times and screams at her. When Mistress discovers what is happening, both her face and the village woman's burn in anger. Sorrow is relieving herself in the yard without care for the eyes of others. The argue is done and Mistress drives us away. After a while she pulls the

horse to a stop. She turns to Sorrow and slaps her face more, saying Fool. I am shock.
Mistress never strikes us. Sorrow does not cry or answer. (Morrison 2008, 63-64)

At the beginning of the novel, Florens is extremely young, and shares a deep bond with her mother, the only person ever to actually love her. The times spent at D'Ortega's plantation with her mother left a deep impression on the young Florens, one that she will never truly forget during the entire novel. One of the most interesting features characteristic of Florens noticeable in the very first pages of the novel would be her fixation with shoes. Florens and her mother live in inhumane conditions on D'Ortega's plantation. There, they were not considered human beings. Florens' mother, who also acts as one of the narrators in the novel, tells the tale of destruction and enslavement not only of herself but of a whole people:

Insults had been moving back and forth to and fro for many seasons between the king of we families and the king of others. I think men thrive on insults over cattle, women, water, crops. Everything heats up and finally the men of their families burn we houses and collect those they cannot kill or find for trade. . . . The men guarding we and selling we are black. . . . It was there [in Barbados] I learned how I was not a person from my country, nor from my families. I was negrita. Everything. Language, dress, gods, dance, habits, decoration, song—all of it cooked together in the color of my skin. So it was as a black that I was purchased by Senhor, taken out of the cane and shipped north to his tobacco plants. (Morrison 2008, 143-144)

At the hands of the slavers, Florens' mother, as many other African women like her, were subjected to systemic psychological, physical and sexual abuse. Gang rapes were used to “break in” the women and crush any notions they might have of maternal bonds. In the face of such brutality, Florens' mother's spirit was all but shattered and the only possible way to spare her daughter the horrors she endured she saw in giving her daughter to Jacob Vaark, a man who saw her as human. While at Jublio, the Catholic slaver D'Ortega's plantation, young Florens develops what could be referred to as a borderline obsession with shoes and an irrational need to possess them. In Florens' mind, shoes undoubtedly represent something she and her mother have been, and actively are being, deprived of. What most other people, especially the people of 17th century

New England, would see as a garment with the utmost practical purpose, Florens perceives as some piece of humanity or human dignity she has been robbed of, or is considered unworthy of. This seemingly small thing, Florens' craving for footwear, can be interpreted as a symptom of a much deeper trauma induced state of mind, as noted by a critic, who deems that "she is constructed as craving for human kindness, probably because of the forced separation from her mother as a result of Vaark's business transaction with D'Ortega. Morrison's trope of the shoes illustrates Florens's wish to belong in an intimidating New World" (Spatzek 2014, 65). As Morrison states in the novel, "The beginning begins with the shoes" (10). Being robbed of the opportunity to wear shoes Florens correctly associates with marginalization, she is stopped from being like other people, her story nipped in the bud. Evidently, for Florens, the act of wearing shoes in some way provides a sense of validation and acknowledgement of herself both as a human being and as a woman. What with her being a victim of systemic and institutionalized racism, and therefore having not been provided a normal or healthy upbringing, and having really no positive role models to look up to, Florens has, through the process of rationalization come to the conclusion that the reason why she has been, and still is, mistreated is because she does not possess elegant footwear, as stated by the author:

When a child I am never able to abide being barefoot and always beg for shoes. . . .
On a winter day when I am still small Lina asks her if she can give me the dead
daughter's shoes. They are black with six buttons each. Mistress agrees but when she
sees me in them she sudden sits down in the snow and cries. . . . I never cry. Even
when the woman steals my cloak and shoes and I am freezing on the boat no tears
come. . . . How long will it take will she get lost will he be there will he come will
some vagrant rape her? She [Florens] needed shoes, proper shoes, to replace the dirty
scraps that covered her feet, and it was only when Lina made her some did she say a
word. . . . That when you return from healing Mistress whether she is live or no I am
here with you always. Never never without you. Here I am not the one to throw out.
No one steals my warmth and shoes because I am small. . . . Seeing you stagger and
bleed I run. Then walk. Then float. An ice floe cut away from the riverbank in deep
winter. I have no shoes. I have no kicking heart no home no tomorrow. (Morrison
2008, 10, 64, 67, 122, 138)

In her mind, her deprivation of shoes, her inability to provide shoes for herself, and the fact that she is being actively denied the possession of shoes makes her a “lesser” human being, someone clearly unwanted, unneeded, and essentially “other”. When noticing her desire for shoes, Florens’ mother reprimands her and warns her against wishing for the shoes she sees her European masters wearing, a subtle hint on the part of the author that oppressed peoples, by and large, ultimately develop some degree of fascination or even admiration of their masters. This need for formation or reclamation of some sense of the self may lead to enslaved and repressed individuals adopting the hateful and violent ways of the very people that placed them in bondage. What Florens’ mother most likely tried to do when forbidding Florens to desire the shoes she saw her European masters wearing was actually preventing Florens from starting to idealize and in some way revere a profoundly corrupt slave-owning society. Florens is literate, she was taught to write in secret by a Catholic priest, which was against the law at the time, and she is also one of the key narrators of the novel. As such, stories provide one of the few ways Florens can relate to the world and the people around her. Stories also provide her with some link to the past, to her people and to her distant homeland. As was the case with Sorrow, Florens also looks to conversation and storytelling as a coping and healing mechanism. One of the best examples of this would be the story Lina tells her about the mother eagle killed by a man claiming all of creation as his own possession. Here the reader is confronted with a story within a story, one mirroring another. The story the fictional characters retell shares much of the same themes of motherhood, love, loss and destruction with the story Morrison is telling. The stories shape reality, and are themselves shaped by the reality of the novel. Therefore the stories themselves are essentially those of perseverance in the face of great difficulties, of struggle to carve out a place for oneself and ones’ family in a hostile and uncaring world and in doing so establish a sense of self within a proverbial quagmire of an indifferent oblivion. Florens prefers these stories because in them she can find a place for herself, and finds a sense of acceptance and belonging in the very act of the storytelling. In critical opinion, the introduction of stories from the natural world, such as those offered by Lina, have roots in the condition of slavery:

Florens’ need and wish to hear the stories of “mothers fighting” stresses the importance of mother-child relationship in her own life. Lina’s story of an eagle

“falling forever” and trying to protect her babies in eggs from man is parallel to a black female slave’s fate and condition that is forced to suffer both the cruelties of slavery and its impact on her later life as well as the impact on orphaned black children. (Bernotaitė-Žukienė 2012, 72)

Florens was separated from her mother at a young age. This act represents the titular “mercy” of the novel. Florens’ mother sold her to Jacob Vaark in order to spare her the beastly treatment she would have no doubt received at the hands of the slavers of D’Ortega’s plantation. Being a very young girl at the time, Florens was, and remains to the very end of the novel, oblivious of this fact and never fully understands the reason why her mother abandoned her when she did. From that point onward, Florens’ life and existence in general, was always in some way dependent on the kindness of strangers and people around her. This dependence could also be linked to the kinds of shoes Florens had during each stage of her life. During her time at D’Ortega’s plantation, she wore shoes that had been discarded by her Portuguese mistress, which could be interpreted as a clear sign of her life as a slave under the yoke of the European masters. Her time on the Vaark farm can be signified by the deerskin moccasins that her Native American mother-figure Lina made for her. These shoes can be interpreted as a sign of racial reconciliation between African-born slaves and the equally oppressed Native Americans. It could also be understood as a clear indication of Florens’ adoption by Lina. When Florens was given the dangerous and incredibly important task of fetching the blacksmith in order to save Rebekka’s life, she wore Jacob Vaark’s shoes, possibly an indication of Florens’ new importance to Rebekka, the new owner of the farm. It could also signify the status of a person who had the right to walk among the slave owning Europeans, whether because of the significance of her mission or some other reason tied to the hegemonic power symbolism represented by the shoes is debatable. Upon her finding and subsequent falling out with the blacksmith, Florens finds herself barefoot yet again, seemingly stripped of all the power and significance she might have had up to that point. All these events serve to precipitate Florens’ traumatic downfall as a human being, forever changing both her perception of the world and her physical appearance, as explained by a critic:

Florens's ruptured relation to her mother is rooted in her mother's physical abuse by slave masters but there is no body mark of her mother's past Florens could identify with or process. She never learns about her mother's background or about her fears for Florens, either. As Florens grows up, she begins to read the signs of the world (letters, weather, plants, animals) and falls for and is rejected by her lover, the blacksmith. Disappointment and a powerful sense of rejection make her want to make sense of her own story by writing it down. Besides recording her own psychological transformations in writing, her body also gets transformed: Florens's unusually tender soles become hard as stone. (Kovács 2021, 168)

Pondering further the issue of appearance when considering the racial issues and slavery within the context of this novel, we are able to see how Morrison directly links race, i.e. outward physical appearance including but not limited to skin tone, the institution of racism and the nature of its implementation and continuation. What becomes painfully apparent from the very beginning of the novel is the fact that all the slaves are of non-European ethnicities and backgrounds. The majority of slaves imported into the burgeoning New World are from Africa, but some notable outliers are represented by peoples imported from the Caribbean islands. And there were, of course, many Native American slaves, constituting no doubt that slim part of their populace that managed to survive the outright destruction and deportation of their people. As I mentioned previously, Morrison does not shy away from highlighting how this sordid process started, that native African peoples were attacked and initially enslaved not by the Europeans but by their own neighbours. It was only when they were sold to the white slavers and brought to the New World that their entire identity was systematically destroyed by the white colonizers who did not want their slaves to possess any sense of collective memory of home or tradition with which they could form bonds of fellowship and unity. The destruction of the self was paramount in the creation of a whole generation of people like Florens who did not know their parents or grandparents, who could not recall their homeland, and who lived in a constant state of fear, anxiety and feeling worthless. This "pacification" or the destruction of a people's will to live free, build communities, families and ultimately prosper was a product of a tried and tested, carefully calculated and meticulously implemented process of stripping an entire swathe of a population of their collective memory and sense of self in order to create a "perfect slave race",

one that could not fight for freedom simply because it was completely oblivious of that particular state of being, namely being free. Morrison showcases the final product of a deeply sinister and profoundly inhuman process, a people whose only chance of survival was servitude, and whose only way of preserving what sense of self remained was the embrace and internalization of this dehumanizing role, as stated by Thounaojam:

The gradual appearance of racial categories in defining slavery alters, alienates and marginalizes lives of major characters in the novel. Gradually when the notion of racism was adopted to justify the smooth running of the institution of slavery, all that was becoming predominant was the increasing sense of dislocation non-white slaves felt and also a growing sense of feeling more rooted in a sense of disrooted-ness. (Thounaojam 2013, 173)

The memory of the homeland becomes systematically targeted and destroyed by the white masters. A powerful tool historically used, and presented in this novel, is precisely that systematic destruction of an entire people's heritage. The memories of their homelands, customs, their very ways of life were being actively suppressed and supplanted by some foreign set of ideals, customs, and religions. The best examples of this would be the imposing of Catholicism and Protestantism on Lina, Florens and Florens's mother. By instilling in these enslaved peoples an inherent sense of unworthiness, of "otherness", of essentially being fundamentally destined to be controlled by the "superior" race, the white slave masters were looking toward the future, and planting the seeds of oppression that would span generations. One of the best examples of racism and racial issues portrayed in the novel is the episode when Florens is on her way to fetch the Blacksmith who was the only person able to save Rebekka's life. Florens encounters a village full of religious zealots who are right in the midst of what could rightly be called a witch hunt, as Babb states:

Convinced of its own correctness, it defined the elect in the narrowest of terms and extended Christian compassion to a limited few. The bankrupt nature of this religion is revealed when Florens seeks the blacksmith's aid for Rebekka and during her trek finds food and shelter at the home of the Widow Ealing and her daughter Jane. There,

she witnesses the mother thrash her daughter in the name of love and salvation. As it turns out, Jane has amblyopia and, because of this, is accused of being a witch. [...]When the local magistrate and his minions return to the Ealing house to continue their investigation into Jane's state, they see Florens—that is, they see her blackness rather than her Christian soul. They inspect her to determine if she is human, forcing her to show teeth, tongue, underarms, and genitals. Their theology has taught not love but fear of difference, whether manifested through the appearance of an eye or through the color of skin. (Babb 2011, 157)

To the eyes of the members of the so-called “superior race” individuals sporting any and all remarkable or unusual characteristics are no better than monsters or devils from the dark depths of the Earth. This episode is a very “on the nose” representation of the most destructive and inhuman aspects of religion-fuelled xenophobia. While one could even understand the level of disgust and fear Florens provoked from these people, their treatment of one of their own paints a more precise picture of the degree of hostility anyone labelled as the “other” was in danger of experiencing. Through scenes such as these, raw, personal and unapologetic, Morrison attempts to recreate the savage nature of a largely forgotten and highly glorified age. The mercy in *Mercy* is nothing less than a mother trying to spare her child the inhumanity a person was liable to suffer at the hands of their fellow man purely on the basis of their appearance or place of birth.

2.2) Self-hatred, Self-destruction, and Childhood in *The Bluest Eye*

The Bluest Eye is Toni Morrison's debut novel, written in 1970. The story of the novel takes place in Lorain, Ohio, which is also Morrison's home town. The novel is set in the immediate aftermath of the Great Depression, in the years 1940 and 1941. It is essentially about childhood and the process of growing up in a very difficult environment marked by poverty, racial prejudice and sexual violence. The story is told by multiple narrators, each one offering a unique and personal point of view on the key events of the novel. The main narrator of the novel is a nine-year-old girl named Claudia MacTeer, and she functions as something of a protagonist since she is present throughout the novel. The story starts with Claudia and her narration of her daily life with her family, which is made up of her parents and her ten-year-old sister, Frieda. The MacTeer household is expanded when they take on a lodger, a mister Henry Washington, and another young girl whose house had burned down, named Pecola Breedlove. It quickly becomes evident that Claudia's family is a tight-knit and loving one, and the initial part of the novel focuses on the family concerned with making ends meet, raising young girls, going to work and school. Pecola becomes friends with Claudia and Frieda, but it quickly becomes apparent that there is something off about her. She is taken in by the MacTeers because her alcoholic father had burned down their house and she had nowhere else to stay. Pecola develops a strange fascination with Shirley Temple and an obsession with blue eyes and white skin, she comes to the conclusion that she is ugly because she is black. Pecola is a very shy and quiet girl, unable to make friends with the other children from school, because of this, Claudia and Frieda feel sorry for her. Eventually, Pecola's moves back in with her family and her life once again starts spiralling out of control. Her father, Cholly, continues drinking and abusing her mother Pauline and brother Sammy. Pauline distances herself from her family, focusing on her job. Sammy is outraged by his father's behaviour and attempts to run away from home on a number of occasions. In time, Pecola retreats further and further into herself, she comes to believe that if she had blue eyes, she would be loved and her life would be in some way transformed. She receives further confirmation of this belief in the way she is treated by other people, like the grocer who looks right through her when she buys candy, the boys who viciously make fun of her, and, Maureen, a light-skinned girl who temporarily befriends her only to make fun of her too. She is also wrongly blamed for killing a boy's cat and called a "nasty little black bitch" by his mother Geraldine, who is a representation of a profoundly tormented and neurotic person.

She had been raised to see herself not as a member of the African American community, but actually as someone “better”, someone who is “closer” to actually being white. Geraldine has fully embraced the white American culture, considering it and white Americans as “superior” to her own family and neighbours, from whom she does everything in her power to segregate herself and her son. Her entire life seems to be reduced to a bitter struggle to escape her own heritage and to meticulously craft an artificial new one.

Pecola’s grip on reality finally starts to slip when she is raped and impregnated by her father. This scandal rocks the entire community, especially Pecola's friends Claudia and Frieda who want Pecola’s baby to live. Pecola herself develops serious mental illness and comes to believe that she finally received her coveted blue eyes.

Following this brief summary of the plot of *The Bluest Eye*, the main focus shall be shifted back to the main focus of this thesis, namely the analysis of the potent and poignant racial issues depicted in this novel. In order to do this, the main focus shall be placed, much as before, on the characters of the novel themselves, the analysis of the events that happen to them and around them, their actions, reactions, and states of mind. When discussing the racial issues of this particular novel, the primary character that should be focused on is Pecola Breedlove. Pecola is a deeply complex, and one might say quite a sad and tragic character. It could well be argued that Pecola represents nothing less than the result of hundreds of years of combined racial hatred, bigotry, and marginalization, as recognized in the following critical opinion: “Pecola is actually a victim of a white society which treats people according to their skin color, a society which conditions her to believe and internalize that she is ugly because she does not epitomize Western values, standards, and conceptions of beauty” (Maleki & Hajjari 2015, 73). As a young girl, Pecola represents a portion of society hit the hardest by the effects of institutionalized racism. Although it could be argued that other characters such as Claudia, Frieda or even Maureen, represent the same demographic, Pecola is specific because she has a fundamentally dysfunctional family, the members of which are themselves thoroughly damaged individuals, as will be demonstrated later in the paper. Another way Pecola serves as a perfect example of racial victimization in its most severe form is Morrison’s intimate portrayal of Pecola’s psyche and her psychological downfall, which is a clear result of the brutality during Pecola’s pubescent life. This is a very important aspect when considering Pecola as a character. Her age is a defining

factor in her perception and understanding of the world around her. As a child, Pecola is highly susceptible to the behaviour of the people in her immediate vicinity that play a part in her life. As can be seen in the novel, some of the most important people in Pecola's upbringing and development of a sense of self, are her father and mother, who are themselves at best bad parents and at worst, criminally destructive in relation to Pecola and her psyche. This negative influence in turn makes Pecola think and act in an essentially self-destructive way, as a critic notes:

A particularly cruel form of this parental abuse is the passing down of their racial self-hatred to the extremely vulnerable Pecola. The result is that she is unable to develop any type of racial consciousness that could counteract the degrading influence of a dominant and racist society. (Mahaffey 2004, 159)

Evidently, Pecola's self-hatred is a symptom of a much larger issue: Pecola's inability to establish some sense of self-respect or even to find a place for herself in society. She is constantly exposed to symbols of beauty and success, to images of a "perfect world" of "beauty", essentially to how the world should be and how people should look like, as the following quotation from the novel demonstrates:

The shame wells up again, its muddy rivulets seeping into her eyes. What to do before the tears come. She remembers the Mary Janes. Each pale yellow wrapper has a picture on it. A picture of little Mary Jane, for whom the candy is named. Smiling white face. Blond hair in gentle disarray, blue eyes looking at her out of a world of clean comfort. The eyes are petulant, mischievous. To Pecola they are simply pretty. She eats the candy, and its sweetness is good. To eat the candy is somehow to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane. (Morrison 2001, 50)

Because Pecola deviates from this arbitrary standard, she arrives to the logical conclusion that there must be something wrong with her. At every turn she experiences societies scorn, she suffers microaggressions at every corner, hence her fascination with Shirley Temple. In Pecola's mind, Shirley is the epitome of womanhood; Shirley would never be shunned like Pecola is daily, as stated by critics:

As Pecola internalizes racial prejudice, she crosses the border from sanity to insanity and starts hallucinating. [...] Pecola's yearning for blue eyes finally leaves her psychologically vulnerable and hallucinating. She enumerates that the way people notice her is more acceptable than what she notices about herself. She internalizes what white people think about her and then she thinks about it seriously and considers it ugly. She takes consolation in a time of loneliness while eating the candy, but more importantly, and symbolically she adopts the smiling picture of the blue-eyed, blond-haired little girl on the wrapper. (Routray & Kuanr 2022, 218)

Pecola's mind creates a self-defence mechanism in the form of vivid hallucinations. What might have started as mere flights of fancy turned into full on escapes from reality in which Pecola is free from discrimination and fits into a preconceived standard of beauty. She becomes something she clearly is not, and gains those attributes she clearly lacks. The truly gut-wrenching aspect of all this is the fact that Pecola is not doing this out of some shallow, vacuous desire for physical beauty. She is fantasizing in the manner she is because of her desire to stop being hurt, both psychologically and physically. Her mind and her body come under constant attack by people who actively go out of their way to assault Pecola in some manner, be it a casually dropped remark, a sideways glance, or even a full on physical beating, as noticed by critics:

Pecola's wish for blue eyes is her way to escape the microaggression situations she faced again and again. As the narrator says, "It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights—if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different...Pretty eyes. Pretty blue eyes. Big blue pretty eyes" (46). Pecola's yearning represents the yearning of the black community to move from the marginalized space to the mainstream. (Routray & Kuanr 2022, 218–219)

In order to begin to understand a child's state of mind, especially a child so deeply disturbed like Pecola, one need not look any further than the child's parents. In Pecola's case, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, the parents also exhibit clear signs of deep-rooted trauma, and their

characters are laden with various insecurities, emotional damage and flaws which make them not only practically unable to properly function in human society, but also unable to fulfil their roles as parents and caretakers. Pecola's mother, Pauline, should be the first character to focus on when considering the root cause of Pecola's unhealthy state of mind. Pauline, or Polly, did not always exhibit signs of pathological behaviour. She spent most of her early years in the country and enjoyed a peaceful, perhaps somewhat dull life. She was very much unencumbered by feelings of inequality or lesser value, she did not really have the need to conform to beauty standards of the time, i.e. she did not wear makeup or straighten her hair to look more like white women, as Morrison describes:

Restricted, as a child, to this cocoon of her family's spinning, she cultivated quiet and private pleasures. She liked, most of all, to arrange things. To line things up in rows—jars on shelves at canning, peach pits on the step, sticks, stones, leaves—and the members of her family let these arrangements be. When by some accident somebody scattered her rows, they always stopped to retrieve them for her, and she was never angry, for it gave her a chance to rearrange them again. Whatever portable plurality she found, she organized into neat lines, according to their size, shape, or gradations of color. Just as she would never align a pine needle with the leaf of a cottonwood tree, she would never put the jars of tomatoes next to the green beans. During all of her four years of going to school, she was enchanted by numbers and depressed by words. She missed—without knowing what she missed—paints and crayons. (Morrison 2001, 111)

What can be understood from the way the author describes Pauline's early life, as represented by this excerpt, is that she was a very different person in her youth, before she moved from the country and married Cholly. Evidently Pauline possessed a highly creative personality, one that focused on creating order and beauty from a world of randomness and chaos. Since she was unburdened by some artificial need to pretend to be someone else, anyone else other than her, she was free to pursue her interests and live her life uninhibited by feelings of inferiority she would come to cultivate later on in her married life. What can also be seen is that Pauline was academically inclined, what with her being especially interested in numbers. Perhaps it wouldn't

be such a stretch of imagination to assume that, had the circumstances been different, Pauline would have been able to pursue a successful academic career, or at the very least achieve higher education. It would certainly seem that her marriage to Cholly and the act of starting a family with him significantly curtailed her own academic and creative aspirations, and paved the way of the transformation of her character from an active and creative one to a passive one, shifting her focus from the things she enjoyed doing to the things she felt necessary to be done, like providing for her family by transforming herself into something artificial and servile. An interesting fact to consider Pauline's early life is that she lived in an environment that was devoid of any need for pretence, that is to say, in the urban environment of Pauline's youth there was no need to try to be like someone else, and appearances were of lesser importance than in the capitalist urban environment. Nevertheless, Pauline was relatively happy in the country. An injury-caused deformity affected the way she walked. This always represented a problem for her, but never so much as to affect her state of mind. Eventually, she met Cholly, her future husband and Pecola's future father, and fell deeply in love with him. She also begins to be fascinated by movies and film stars. She starts going to the cinema in secret and eventually develops a fixation with the perfect lives, perfect people, and perfect families she sees on the silver screen. This fixation with Hollywood's representation of the "perfect life" causes Pauline to become dissatisfied with her own physical appearance and lot in life. She comes to detest her skin colour, her injured foot, and over time becomes convinced that she is in fact ugly. Her marriage to Cholly becomes a living nightmare, mainly because of his alcoholism and violent outbursts. In the face of all this, Pauline retreats further into herself, and, much like Pecola, she attempts to create a perfect world in her head, inspired by movies and her devotion to Christianity. In relation to the latter, she refuses to divorce Cholly, and instead comes to venerate her suffering at his hands as some form of martyrdom. She also starts working as a servant to a white family. Over time, she comes to respect and venerate this family far more than her own, since she sees them as virtuous and beautiful, unlike her own family who are ugly and sinful. She does all in her power to curry favour of her new masters, even going to the lengths of attempting to become their pseudo-family member. This represents a perfect way to uphold her fantasy of having the "perfect" family and living with "perfect" people, i.e. the white people she saw on a screen, as stated by critics:

Needless to say, such grasping alone holds little potential for eliminating prejudice and having seen its ugly head rear some individuals are ready to take radical steps to blend in with the privileged group. This is exemplified by Pecola's mother, Pauline, who embraces the Euro-American values, but not being able to look like Jean Harlow, she finds refuge in a world of white family household where she becomes a servant. There she finds what she perceives as beauty, harmony and order, but ironically this in turn separates her from her own family and the already weak daughter-mother bond is strained yet again. During Pecola's visit to that “white house”, she accidentally splashes juice on the floor which makes her mother angry and consequently frightens the little white girl her mother looks after. Pauline's response is to scold her own daughter while consoling the other girl. (Zebialowicz & Palasinski 2010, 227)

The degree to which Pauline's relationship with her own family deteriorates becomes evident in a number of subtle ways, one of which would definitely be the way Pecola refers to her as “Mrs Breedlove”. This peculiar honorific speaks volumes of Pauline's inability to connect with her own child at a deeper maternal level. Instead, she endeavours to cut herself off from her unwanted family, one that produces in her feelings of shame and disgust. On the other hand, the family for which Pauline works as a servant addresses her as “Polly”. Pauline makes no objections to this; on the contrary, she takes great pleasure in this unusually high degree of familiarity. In her mind, she is actually a part of their family, she is “their” Polly, someone they acknowledge as an equal, a woman, perhaps even a “beautiful” woman or at the very least not ugly. The fantasy is broken when she comes home from work, sees Cholly drunk, Pecola and her brother Sammy black, with their not-blue eyes looking at her, with their not-straight hair, their not-perfect teeth. All this only serves to pull Pauline back into the real world; or rather, what could rightly be called another delusion, as stated by Moore:

As a domestic, Pauline seeks relief from her constricted world of ugly deformity in the spacious home of a wealthy white family, where her skin glows, inauthentically, “like taffeta in the reflection of white porcelain” (126, 107). The mother- daughter dyad is loveless and distant, indicated by Pecola's reference to her mother as “Mrs.

Breedlove.” However, at her white employers’ home, Mrs. Breedlove becomes “Polly,” a girlish name implying her impenetrable racial/spatial barriers as a black woman and a mother. As a demonic parody of Dick and Jane’s mother, Mrs. Breedlove radically counters the tranquil, domestic image of the ethereal “Mother” in the mythological space of the primer. She is not a powerful maternal cure for an ailing culture and daughter, but rather a symptom/victim of cultural and social engineering. (Moore 2020, 9)

When considering this concept of victimhood within the Breedlove family, it would be impossible to overlook one of the most disturbed and twisted characters in this entire novel, Cholly Breedlove. Cholly is one of the most detestable characters in literature, and yet Toni Morrison herself created him to represent something more than just a monster. His backstory from *The Bluest Eye* provides the reader with some understanding as to why this man committed the most heinous and animalistic crime a father ever could. Cholly never knew his own parents; his mother left him on a literal garbage heap, a powerful symbol of maternal abandonment. As such, Cholly never had the chance to feel a parent’s unconditional love. Another incident which can be understood as a tell-tale sign of why Cholly did what he did would be Cholly’s first sexual experience. Cholly and his childhood friend Darlene were caught having sex by a couple of racist white men, as noted by critics:

At gunpoint, Cholly and Darlene have to pretend to have sex, which is clearly a kind of rape enforced on both of them. Not being able to hate the white men, against whom he is powerless, he directs his anger towards Darlene instead who is the witness of his humiliation by the men. The feeling of being emasculated and rendered impotent in front of the girl he should be able to protect is too much for him. (Ratu & Supsiadji 2019, 24)

This incident can be looked upon as a watershed moment in Cholly’s life, one that would lead to him developing into a profoundly disturbed individual. Up to this point, Cholly had a chance of developing into a functional human being. However, the profound traumatic nature of this event served only to deaden within him any semblance of emotional intelligence he had up to that

point. From here on, he will fight with a constant sense of emasculation and of dehumanization, as portrayed by the author:

The sofa, for example. It had been purchased new, but the fabric had split straight across the back by the time it was delivered. The store would not take the responsibility “Looka here, buddy. It was O.K. when I put it on the truck. The store can’t do anything about it once it’s on the truck” Listerine and Lucky Strike breath. “But I don’t want no tore couch if’n it’s bought new.” Pleading eyes and tightened testicles. “Tough shit, buddy. Your tough shit” You could hate a sofa, of course—that is, if you could hate a sofa. But it didn’t matter. You still had to get together \$4.80 a month. If you had to pay \$4.80 a month for a sofa that started off split, no good, and humiliating—you couldn’t take any joy in owning it. (Morrison 2001, 36)

To those two white men that traumatized him so profoundly Cholly was nothing more than an animal, at that moment there to entertain them, in some perverted way. It could be argued that from that point onward, Cholly will never truly feel like a man, evident from his interactions with the world. He finds himself unable to wrestle some modicum of control over his own life. He finds himself unable to get respect, to achieve success, or even to be looked upon as a human being. What must be mentioned also was that this event sparked within Cholly a profound feeling of misogyny. He blamed Darlene for what happened to them at that moment. From that point on, every woman in his life will, in his mind’s eye, be Darlene, and he will harbour a sense of resentment against all of them. This resentment is best observed in his marriage to Pauline, where things escalate even further, as the author portrays:

Cholly and Mrs. Breedlove fought each other with a darkly brutal formalism that was paralleled only by their lovemaking. Tacitly, they had agreed not to kill each other. He fought her the way a coward fights a man—with feet, the palms of his hands, and teeth. She, in turn, fought back in a purely feminine way—with frying pans and pokers, and occasionally a flatiron would sail toward his head. They did not talk, groan, or

curse during these beatings. There was only the muted sound of falling things, and flesh on unsurprised flesh. (Morrison 2001, 43)

The violent destruction of the Breedlove family can be interpreted to be a clear result of centuries of institutionalized racism. The father that does not and cannot feel like a man, a mother that idolizes other families and demonizes her own, a son that is looking for any opportunity to flee this unhealthy environment and a daughter that wishes to be somebody else. Here we can observe nothing less than the destruction of the family unit, perpetrated by nothing less than the seditious influence of a corrupted society. However, as can be clearly seen from the novel itself, the fate of the Breedlove family is an extreme example of a “perfect storm” of events necessary to trigger such a destructive outcome. The other family featured in the novel, the MacTeers, share many of the distinguishing features observable in the Breedloves. What makes the MacTeers different is nothing less than the inexistence of pathological and extremely destructive character traits so painfully evident in the Breedlove family. Claudia represents a counter force to Pecola, where Pecola sees beauty, Claudia sees arbitrariness. Claudia is not bewitched by higher aesthetic preconceptions; on the contrary, she actively fights the prescribed beauty standard by her destruction of her white dolls and her revulsion towards Shirley Temple, as stated by the author:

I couldn't join them in their adoration because I hated Shirley. Not because she was cute, but because she danced with Bojangles, who was my friend, my uncle, my daddy, and who ought to have been soft-shoeing it and chuckling with me. Instead he was enjoying, sharing, giving a lovely dance thing with one of those little white girls whose socks never slid down under their heels. So I said, “I like Jane Withers.” They gave me a puzzled look, decided I was incomprehensible, and continued their reminiscing about old squint-eyed Shirley. Younger than both Frieda and Pecola, I had not yet arrived at the turning point in the development of my psyche which would allow me to love her. What I felt at that time was unsullied hatred. (Morrison 2001, 19)

Both Claudia and her sister Frieda exhibit a healthy sense of self and are willing to fight anyone or anything that wilfully and maliciously encroaches upon it. They are not alone in this endeavour, their mother and father do everything in their power to shield their daughters from the worst aspects of the world. They never belittle them nor wish they were somebody else. This is evident in the way Mrs MacTeer cares for Claudia when she becomes sick, and in the way Mr MacTeer chases away Henry Washington, their lodger, after he tries to molest Frieda. The reason behind all these things is the mutual love and respect the MacTeers have for the members of their family. They have not allowed outside influence to mar their perspective of what is just and right, in spite of all the evils of the world they had no doubt witnessed. Pecola, and by extension her entire family, represent the end result of a four hundred-year-old system designed and created for the sole purpose of destroying African Americans for no other reason than some arbitrary notion of beauty or some deeply misguided sense of pride and humanity. The Breedloves were damaged beyond repair before they even started their family, the sum of all their traumas and feelings of unworthiness compounded by their violent need to lash out at their own people directly resulted in the creation of Pecola, a young woman so profoundly broken that she was robbed of all sense of self.

2.3) Frank's Odyssey: Reclaiming What Was Lost in *Home*

Home is Toni Morrison's tenth novel, and was originally published in 2012. The story of the novel is about a 24-year-old African American Korean War veteran, Frank Money, and his return from the war to a segregated Jim Crow America. The story also follows, to a lesser extent, Frank's younger sister Ycidra, commonly referred to as Cee. Frank receives a note telling him to travel to Atlanta, Georgia in order to save his sister's life. It is heavily implied that his sister is in some mortal danger and that he is the only one who can save her. The note also says that he has to hurry or Cee will die before he arrives in Georgia. The beginning of the novel, however, finds Frank in a mental institution. Frank suffers from a severe case of post-traumatic stress disorder, commonly known as PTSD, and lapses into episodes in which he loses his perception of time and space. The novel then tells the reader the story of Frank and Cee's childhood. They grew up in a small town in Georgia called Lotus. There they were raised mainly by their grandfather's wife, Lenore, who was very abusive and treated them poorly. Lenore's abuse was not focused solely on Frank and Cee, and it also affected their parents after a brief period of time in the story. Lenore's ire and mistreatment especially targeted Cee. In her mind, Cee is an abomination, an unlucky child born on the road, destined to spread misfortune onto everyone around her. The reason behind this was the fact that Cee was born after the family was evicted by racists from their home in Texas, and Lenore was unaware that she would receive another "mouth to feed". This caused Frank to become highly protective of his sister, seeing as how he was the only real family she had. Eventually, Cee fell in love and married a man named Prince and moved to Atlanta, Georgia. She knew nobody in the big city, and Prince eventually grew tired of her and left her, taking a prized automobile gifted to them by Lenore:

His having easy access to the Ford suited everyone because Prince washed away the eternal road dust that floured it, changed plugs and oil, and never gave lifts to the boys who begged to join him in the car. It was natural for Luther to agree to let the couple drive it to Atlanta, since they promised to return it in a few weeks. Never happened. She was all alone now, sitting in a zinc tub on a Sunday defying the heat of Georgia's version of spring with cool water while Prince was cruising around with his thin-soled shoes pressing the gas pedal in California or New York, for all she knew. (Morrison 2013, 69-70)

In Atlanta, Cee took all the work she could get, and eventually found work as a kitchen hand. The salary was low, so she looked for employment elsewhere. She found another job working as an assistant for a doctor of some renown named Beauregard Scott. Doctor Scott seemed like a decent man, he did display a disturbing fondness for eugenics and race science, however. Cee takes a great liking towards the doctor and decides to remain in his employ, where she befriends the doctor's housekeeper, Sarah. Frank escapes the mental institution and decides to head straight for Atlanta. He is aided in his escape by a pastor and his wife, and they provide him with some money for the trip and tell him who else could give him a hand. Thus starts Frank's long journey to Atlanta. On it, he has plenty of time to reflect upon his life so far. He thinks about Lily, the woman he was with before he set out, and how things didn't work out between them even though he loved her and she seemed to love him back. He thinks about his restless childhood, his desire for adventure and action, about how excited he was about joining the army and going to war. He also remembers the horrors of war and the atrocity he committed, the killing of a young Korean girl. Upon arriving in Atlanta, Frank immediately goes to Scott, where he finds his sister on the brink of death. He takes his sister back to their home town, where she is healed by a Miss Ethel Fordham and other neighbourhood women. As a result of Doctor Scott's experimentation on Cee she is rendered infertile, which causes her great distress as she really wanted to have children. Being back in their home town does both Frank and Cee a world of good. They find an unmarked grave of a man killed in some kind of blood-sport. They witnessed this man's death when they were teenagers and they never forgot where they saw that man buried in a shallow grave. They take a quilt that Cee made, and wrap the bones of the dead man in it and bury it, giving the man a proper funeral.

As evident from the summary of the plot, Morrison's novel *Home* is a heart-warming tale of family and finding one's place in the world. It is also a carefully constructed tale that examines some of the most important societal issues such as racism, mental illness, treatment of veterans, segregation, quasi-science, toxic family relations, the value of community, and the value of alternative medicine. For the sake of this particular thesis, some key moments of the novel regarding the issues of racism will be examined in some detail. When considering the racial issues of this novel, the most suitable character to start with would perhaps be one of the two protagonists, Frank Money, what with him being a returning veteran struggling with the effects

of severe PTSD, coupled with the fact that he is an African American living in Jim Crow era South, as stated by a critic:

Once at home, Frank needs to confront his original racial trauma to bring to surface hidden truth of his war experience. An important factor leading to the construction of the self is the treatment of the black people that Frank has witnessed during his childhood. As it was believed, the consciousness of self and its construction are rooted in the interaction with the surrounding environment. When Frank was just a little kid, he started to realize the social rules of the American society. (Yazdani 2022, 195)

Frank's childhood had not been an easy one. Even before the story really starts following his life, the reader is personally acquainted with the state of affairs in Texas, a state of the American south, so famous for facilitating the evil institution of slavery. A group of African American landowners, Frank's own family, are violently driven off their land at gunpoint, with one man refusing to leave and subsequently being made an example of. This immediate scene of violence, death, and displacement is purposefully created by Morrison in order to show the reader what kind of life these people had and were used to seeing on a regular basis, as illustrated in the following example:

Better than most, he [Frank] knew that being outside wasn't necessary for legal or illegal disruption. You could be inside, living in your own house for years, and still, men with or without badges but always with guns could force you, your family, your neighbors to pack up and move—with or without shoes. Twenty years ago, as a four-year-old, he had a pair, though the sole of one flapped with every step. Residents of fifteen houses had been ordered to leave their little neighborhood on the edge of town. Twenty-four hours, they were told, or else. "Else" meaning "die." It was early morning when the warnings came, so the balance of the day was confusion, anger, and packing. By nightfall most were pulling out—on wheels if available, on foot if not. Yet, in spite of the threats from men, both hooded and not, and pleadings from neighbors, one elderly man named Crawford sat on his porch steps and refused to

vacate. Elbows on knees, hands clasped, chewing tobacco, he waited the whole night. Just after dawn at the twenty-fourth hour he was beaten to death with pipes and rifle butts and tied to the oldest magnolia tree in the county—the one that grew in his own yard. Maybe it was loving that tree which, he used to brag, his great-grandmother had planted, that made him so stubborn (Morrison 2013, 17, 18).

This particular excerpt serves best to showcase the profoundly cruel and uncertain nature of life for African Americans living in the Deep South. The author portrays a world where no Black person is safe, men, women, children, entire families could be harassed, assaulted, and forcibly evicted at a moment's notice. It didn't matter that these people did literally nothing to deserve this kind of behaviour directed towards them; they were considered to be "subhuman", something other, something lesser. There was to be no parlay, no discussion or dealings with "the likes of them", only brutal shows of force and ultimatums shouted from the other end of a gun. In short, nobody was safe. Frank was born and raised in this vicious world, from a tender age he saw, and was made well aware of the cruelty of which he and his family were all too often the victims. But there is another unique phenomenon presented by the author within this excerpt, and that is the resolute and courageous defiance in the face of unimaginable brutality that eventually prevails and ushers in a new age of civil rights and equality. Crawford's martyrdom was deliberately and naturalistically presented by Morrison in order to showcase the courageous defiance harboured by the African American community. It would be precisely the brave people like Crawford that would eventually bring down the inhuman system of segregation strangling an entire race of people in the land of the free. Through the plot of this novel Frank would prove to be one of these courageous individuals, changing the world not through acts of violence but of peaceful nobility, rising above the hate and so creating a better world for their families. Then the story starts following the young Frank Money and his sister. It quickly becomes clear that their parents, while no doubt doing all in their power to secure some form of future for their children, were actually not really there for them at this crucial time in their lives. This being the case, Frank was left much up to his own devices, his only source of joy and companionship being Cee. It could be argued that this rough childhood, and the fact that they really had no other family, was the cause behind Frank and Cee's close relationship. Frank was made aware from a very young age that he was the only one who really had any power to protect both himself and his

sister. This made Frank develop a strongly protective attitude towards his sister. Another symptom of this hard life was Frank's desire to leave their home town of Lotus at the earliest possibility. Frank came to the conclusion that anywhere would be better than there, so as many other young men of his generation, he joined the army. This he did not out of any inherent sense of duty towards his country, but rather out of the need to get away from what he understood and perceived to be a hostile environment. Another key reason behind his joining the army would be Frank's desire to "become a man" i.e. to prove himself in the eyes of his fellow (white) Americans. He thought that by joining the army he would finally get some respect as a man. As can be seen from all the events that led up to Frank joining the army, the loss of his parents and family, the mistreatment he and his sister received from their uncaring grandfather's wife Lenore, the fact that from an extremely young age Frank was forced to take care of Cee seeing as there was no one else they could turn to, all this coupled with the fact that both he and his sister lived in constant fear of attack by racists should have had a profoundly negative effect on Frank's psyche. One would expect a man to buckle under the weight of all this stress and responsibility, but Frank didn't. In spite of all this adversity he manages to retain a moral compass and preserve his sense of right and wrong. Even after returning from the army, into which he went to try to find a place where he would be appreciated, and having failed to do so coming back home a forgotten cast-out with PTSD, Frank still manages to rise above his sense of disillusionment and overcome his hatred, best shown in his encounter with Beauregard where everyone would condone Frank killing him for what he did to his sister.

His service in the army did no favours for Frank. At this time the U.S. army became desegregated, meaning for the first time in American history black soldiers were given the opportunity to fight for their country side by side with their white compatriots. Prior to this, black soldiers were most often given support roles such as janitorial duties, cooking, maintenance, digging graves, menial tasks like that. Needless to say, African Americans embraced this change wholeheartedly and many black soldiers distinguished themselves on foreign battlefields through acts of unparalleled courage. These soldiers find their representation in Frank, who proved himself a formidable soldier in the Korean War. His service was not justly rewarded however, because upon returning to the segregated South, Frank became just another faceless nobody, an "undesirable" forced to go to segregated bathrooms, and ride on segregated trains, with nobody ever giving him credit for defending his country. "An integrated army is

integrated misery. You all go fight, come back, they treat you like dogs. Change that. They treat dogs better” (Morrison, 29). Overseas in Korea, he gained nothing except new insight into the cruelty of man. His friends with whom he joined up and travelled with and came to Korea with died in a gruesome way right in front of Frank’s eyes. Naturally, he blames himself in some way for their deaths. Another, equally gruesome thing happened to Frank there, one that would affect his life in an even more negative way and that would send him spiralling into the depths of his own mind, as noted by Cazacu:

The war imagery pervades all stages of the novel, lingering in Frank’s memory and provoking uncontrollable reactions typical of the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (P.T.S.D.). The story is rendered fragmentarily by employing the stream of consciousness technique, which reveals a protagonist who hardly knows if what he experiences are consequences of the violent past, effects of the harsh present or glimpses into a disfigured future. (Cazacu 2019, 93)

Upon returning to the U.S. Frank exhibits signs of severe PTSD. It gets so bad that sometimes he forgets where he is and when he is, he finds himself back in a bombed out trench somewhere in Korea fighting for his life, seeing his friends die over and over again. As a result of this, Frank is committed to an institution. The first thing to mention when considering this turn of events is that Frank, upon returning home from the war, achieved the rank of a U.S. army veteran. Despite this, mainly due to the colour of his skin, and to a lesser degree, his young age, people don’t always believe him to be a veteran.

Suitably dressed, Frank felt proud enough to take his medal from his army pants and pin it to his breast pocket.

“Okay,” said Billy. “Now for some grown man’s shoes. Thom McAn or do you want Florsheim?”

“Neither. I ain’t going to a dance. Work shoes.”

“Got it. You got enough money?”

“Yep.”

The police would have thought so too, but during the random search outside the shoe store they just patted pockets, not the inside of work boots. Of the two other men facing the wall, one had his switchblade confiscated, the other a dollar bill. All four lay their hands on the hood of the patrol car parked at the curb. The younger officer noticed Frank's medal.

"Korea?"

"Yes, sir."

"Hey, Dick. They're vets."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Look." The officer pointed to Frank's service medal.

"Go on. Get lost, pal." The police incident was not worth comment so Frank and Billy walked off in silence. (Morrison 2013, 54-55)

What is even more concerning, even when this truth is somehow acknowledged, Frank is not treated like the other white veterans are treated. Because he is an African American, he still has to suffer the legalized injustices of the segregated Jim Crow American society. Frank finds himself practically discarded, "dumped" into a third-rate institution where he is practically incarcerated with no real chance to get any sort of medical assistance of any kind. Eventually, Frank manages literally to break out of the institution, and then he finds himself on the road, headed for Atlanta, on a quest to save his sister: "Across the racially intolerant country that he served abroad. . . . Frank's fate mirrors American society in the Jim Crow era, when racially discriminatory laws controlled social, economic, and political relationships between African Americans and whites (Kondali & Novkinić 2021, 194-195).

Travelling across America at that particular time in history was an ordeal, especially for an African American travelling through the segregated, Jim Crow south. On many occasions, Frank finds himself having to rely on his wits and the charity of strangers to get from point A to point B. What makes this journey even more perilous for Frank is the fact that he is actively suffering from symptoms of severe PTSD. Every sight, every sound and every smell are liable to trigger something within Frank that transports him back to that battlefield in Korea. His thoughts are

always plagued by visions of the deaths of his childhood friends, Stuff and Mike. The gruesomeness of the nature of their passing haunts Frank with each step and is not something he can easily forget.

Mike in his arms again thrashing, jerking, while Frank yelled at him. “Stay here, man. Come on. Stay with me.” Then whispering, “Please, please.” When Mike opened his mouth to speak, Frank leaned in close and heard his friend say, “Smart, Smart. Don’t tell Mama.” Later, when Stuff asked what he said, Frank lied. “He said, ‘Kill the fuckers.’ ” By the time medics got there, the urine on Mike’s pants had frozen and Frank had had to beat away pairs of black birds, aggressive as bombers, from his friend’s body. [...] Weeks later, after Red was pulverized, blood seeped from Stuff’s blasted arm. Frank helped Stuff locate the arm twenty feet away half buried in the snow. [...] Frank had waited, oblivious of receding gunfire, until the medics left and the grave unit arrived. There was too little left of Red to warrant the space of a whole stretcher, so he shared his remains with another’s. Stuff had gotten a whole stretcher to himself, though, and holding his severed arm in the connected one he lay on the stretcher and died on it before the agony got to his brain. (Morrison 2013, 132, 133, 134)

Then there is the horrid crime he himself committed in the godforsaken trenches of Korea. For the first part of the novel, Frank recounts the killing of a very young Korean child by a guard manning his post in the lull between the fighting. The vision of the guard shooting the little girl in the face after she had tried to sell her body to the man for some food haunts Frank’s dreaming and waking hours more than any other atrocity he had witnessed. Later on in the novel, the reader learns the much uglier truth. It was actually Frank who killed the little girl. His envisioning of the event placed him in a role of a witness rather than that of the perpetrator in order to keep his already damaged mind from fracturing even further. Here again we are able to see how Morrison portrays the mind of a character fighting against the ghastly nature of the world around them by fabricating fantasies in order to preserve some shred of sanity while maintaining the characters' grip on reality. It could well be argued that at that point of the story, Frank travelling to save his sister whose status is still unknown, surrounded at all sides by a

hostile environment full of enemies ready to destroy him for making the slightest mistake in conduct or social faux pas, his mind simply could not afford the luxury of dealing with his past traumas. So, in order to achieve the goal he set for himself, and get to his journey's end, Frank's inability to face the truth was actually a physiological response of the human body, and that that particular bodily function is present in all Morrison's novels analysed in this thesis, as noted by Moore:

Frank kills a young Korean girl who is looking for food while tempting him sexually, a temptation he kills by murdering her. However, he disassociates himself from the murder of a child by referring to himself in the third person as "the guard" doing the killing (96). He suffers from bloodguilt and survivor's guilt, having killed and having stayed alive, unlike his friends. Back home in Jim Crow America and traveling from Portland, Oregon, and Chicago, Illinois, to Lotus, Georgia, and home, Frank enters another combat zone where African Americans, even veterans, are reminded of their second-class citizenship. To separate the white and mainstream body from the black body, transportation systems were required legally to separate the races with the placement of partitions. (Moore 2020, 68)

Eventually, Frank manages to track down his sister Cee at the home and "clinic" of Doctor Scott. What happens next is perhaps the most important moment in the entire novel, one that will truly define Frank as a character. The climactic showdown between Frank and the evil doctor Scott serves as a watershed moment in the development and healing process of Frank's character. From what the reader could ascertain up to this point in the story regarding Frank is that he is very much a man "on the edge", so to speak. The reason behind this, the fact that Frank finds it extremely hard to let his guard down, would be the fact that he was forced to basically fight for his life since he was a boy growing up in the Jim Crow era South. He had witnessed enough racially motivated violence in his young age to make him perpetually wary of potential trouble lurking around every corner. Witnessing a man gunned down and then buried in a shallow grave as an animal for sport left a deep impression on Frank, and he would do anything in his power to avoid such a fate. He has proved himself more than capable enough of getting himself out of life-threatening situations. Another aspect of Frank's character showcased up to this point is the fact

that he does not shy away from using violence in situations that call for it. During his time in the U.S. he had resorted to using violence purely in within the confines of self-defence. In Korea, however, he had shown clear signs of resorting to violence without any cause for it, the major example of that being his murder of a child. While this use of deadly force during his time in the army could be justified by the simple fact that it is a soldier's job to kill his enemies, the killing of such an innocent being such as a child indicated to a deep fault within Frank's ability to recognize right from wrong. Now he is up against, what could well be argued to be the chief antagonist of the story, Doctor Scott, a man who has used and abused Frank's beloved sister Cee in the most inhuman way imaginable, a man who felt no hint of remorse about experimenting on people like they were animals, about sterilizing those people whom he deemed "unfit" to reproduce, a man who gave credibility to institutionalized racism and slavery by studying, perfecting and implementing the quasi-science of eugenics. Upon bursting into such a man's office and finding the person he cared most for in the entire world, Frank did something arguably no one expected him to do, portrayed by the author in this breath-taking scene:

When Frank got to the bottom of the stairs he saw through an open door a small white-haired man sitting at a large desk. The man looked up. "What? Who are you?" The doctor's eyes widened then narrowed at the insult of being invaded by a stranger. Frank moved closer to the desk. "There's nothing to steal here! Sarah!" [...] The doctor raised the gun and pointed it at what in his fear ought to have been flaring nostrils, foaming lips, and the red-rimmed eyes of a savage. Instead he saw the quiet, even serene, face of a man not to be fooled with. He pulled the trigger. The click from the empty chamber was both tiny and thunderous [...] Frank walked into the room where his sister lay still and small in her white uniform. Asleep? He felt her pulse. Light or none? He leaned in to hear breath or no breath. She was cool to the touch, none of the early warmth of death. Frank knew death and this was not it—so far... Then he knelt by Cee's bed, slid his arms under her shoulders and knees, cradled her in his arms, and carried her up the stairs. (Morrison 2013, 149,150, 151)

He ignored the crackpot's hateful slurs, he ignored the fact that there was a gun pointed at him, he simply took his half-dead sister into his arms and exited the room. In this encounter between

Frank, Beauregard and Cee, specifically refereeing to the way Cee was hurt, there is a reference by the author towards the fact that African Americans were not safe and were under attack even from people who were supposed to improve and save human lives. The savage attack by the doctor upon Cee signifies a prevailing policy of eradication white southerners of that era had when it came to relations with their African American neighbours. Beauregard, a doctor of some esteem among the white community is presented by Morrison as being no better than a gun-toting, sheet-wearing clan member. What makes Beauregard much more terrifying however, would be the fact that he represented a member of the establishment. While the aforementioned armed KKK members could somewhat be dismissed as a fringe extremist paramilitary movement, Beauregard was seen as somewhat of a cornerstone of the medical and academic community of the time, and through him the author portrays just how deep-seated the hate and bigotry towards African Americans in the South at that time really was, as a critic observes:

Morrison involves another posthuman trope when she exposes Cee once more to the horrors of racism combined with science and advanced technology. Cee, the intern assistant of a doctor - a “white coat”, as she calls Dr. Beauregard Scott, hinting at the terrifying episodes in rural Texas when her family had to leave home to escape the violence of the “white sheets” - becomes the subject of experiments in eugenics performed by the modern Frankenstein doctor who maims her and leaves her in front of death’s door. Had it not been for Sarah’s heroic warning sent to Frank and his rapid response, Cee would have died due to supposedly sterilization practices inflicted upon her by the doctor whose books speak of white race supremacy and eugenics. (Cazacu 2019, 95)

This moment signifies a moment of triumph, the triumph of humanity, dignity and love over fear, violence and hate. It is precisely this moment that ushers both Frank and Cee onto a path of healing. By not stooping to the doctor’s level through not using violence, and by rising above the hateful slurs, remarks, and provocations, Frank had shown that he was more of a man, more of a human being, than this so-called “guardian of human purity”. After this episode of the story, Frank and Cee return to the only home they had ever known, their sleepy home town of Lotus, Georgia. Their return is a symbolic gesture, one that indicates the desire for settling down, and

for finally finding peace after a lifetime of wandering, searching, and fighting. In a life-threatening physical state, Cee finds help from the unlikeliest source, the women from their old neighbourhood. The old ladies use everything they had learned over a lifetime of living every day like it could be the last. They implement a wide assortment of traditional folk medicines and procedures that would have, no doubt, been laughed at and dismissed by the leading medical establishment of the time. These old African American ladies and their life-saving remedies manage to undo the damage caused by a white man bearing the disguise of a healer seeking to destroy life, mocking that most sacred tenet of all doctors everywhere: “do no harm”. Through the epic journey to save his sister, its eventual success, and both his and Cee’s return to their home town, Frank achieves a profound form of catharsis. He manages to recover whatever part of himself that hadn’t been destroyed both in the hellish cauldron of the Korean War, and in the vicious world of Jim Crow America. The return and the burial of the man they saw murdered represents a symbolic act of finding one’s home, a place where one can feel free and be one self without the fear of sudden and brutal oppression. But more than the feeling of physical safety and security, Frank and Cee finally find that which both of them had been looking for since the beginning of the novel, the peace of mind. As Manuela López Ramírez points out:

In *Home*, Morrison deals with the recovery from collective and personal trauma. Despite the siblings’ terrible childhood and appalling experiences away from home, at the end of the novel, both achieve significant transmogrification and regeneration. During his trip back home, which reverses blacks’ journey north in search of a better life, Frank, the broken soldier, shows visible signs of improvement in spite of his deep psychological wounds: “For Frank, though, the healing isn’t easy....The Korean veteran is getting rid of his ghosts and his unsettling recollections do not crush or paralyze him anymore His non-violent liberation of Cee from the wicked doctor finally gives him back part of his dignity and manliness. (López Ramírez 2017, 136)

Eventually, Cee recovers physically, but the Doctor’s experiments leave her unable to bear children of her own. Frank is glad to be back home, but he still can’t really centre himself, and his thoughts race back to his childhood and the time he spent in Lotus before joining the army. The ending of the novel sees both Frank and Cee overcoming their life long trauma, inflicted

upon them by a brutal and deeply racist society of the Jim Crow era south. This powerful message by the author denotes the true value of familial love and the importance of preserving the African American community and the family unit which is most often the first target of racial attack, as a critic notes:

When they were children, Frank could calm Cee's fears simply by placing one hand on her head and the other at the nape of her neck. By the end of the novel, both realize that their respective traumas will be healed not by obliterating the pain of the past, but by facing their fears together. In the end, both Frank and Cee find healing and find home. (Smith 2012, 134)

The final act of healing, for both Frank and Cee would come in the form of a burial they provide for an unknown man killed in some type of blood-sport and unceremoniously buried right in front of their eyes. The memory of that man being discarded like garbage is something both of them never forgot after so many years. They find where he was "dumped", dig his remains up, wrap them in a quilt Cee made and then put the remains into a bow of a tree. This was, perhaps, the most important symbol of the power both of preserving strong and healthy familial bonds, but also of the necessity to face racially-inflicted trauma, no matter how hard it might be, as the author portrays the best and most healthy way to deal with this type of negative emotion is through peaceful reflection and contemplation of one's place in the world with the ultimate goal to establish a place in it one can be proud to call home. The act of nailing a wooden epitaph upon the tree under which the man is buried, the message saying "Here Stands a Man" is an extremely powerful symbol of resistance and perseverance. Having used those precise words Frank and Cee proclaim the status of both themselves and their entire race, they are people, men and women, not chattel to be bought and sold or shipped of or destroyed at will. They affirm their status as fully rounded rational human beings and as citizens of their country, as a critic states:

This performative act of respect and compassion, in words and deed, has a healing and liberating effect on the protagonists, but especially for Frank as this act of burial and restoring dignity to a human being and a member of his community [...] At the same time, the secret burial at the farm from their childhood becomes a point of

recollection of the collective trauma of all African Americans [...] Frank has returned to the site of trauma from his childhood and, as a grown man, paid his respects to his townsman. In this way, Frank is finally able to stand as a man because he is turning into a more balanced version of himself. With this action, Frank and Cee pay their respects to the victim of racial violence and express solidarity with the community to which they belong. (Kondali & Novkinić 2021, 499)

Through this gesture, Morrison signifies the value and importance of community and tradition, symbolized by the quilt, and ancestry and home, symbolized by the trunk of a large bay tree so common in those parts of southern U.S. Through this process of laying to rest the past, Morrison provides a way into the future. It is only through acceptance and looking forward that old wounds can be healed, even the deep wounds inflicted by racism and slavery.

3) Conclusion

Living in our new and modern age of lightning fast information traffic and unparalleled access to knowledge and research, one might think that the negative aspects of society such as racial bigotry, institutionalized racism, sexual discrimination, and maltreatment of the mentally ill are a thing of the past, only to be seen in museums and pages of history books. What Toni Morrison portrays in her novels, especially perhaps in the novels examined in this thesis, paints a whole different picture regarding these notions and the modern society. What can be seen immediately, through the prism of Morrison's novels, is that the scars left by the heinous institution of slavery are very much present and visible in the U.S. society to this very day. What makes these novels so relevant is Morrison's highly realistic depiction of oppression of not only African Americans, but also of all the other otherized peoples within America. Morrison does not discriminate in her portrayal of marginalization. As seen in the analyses of her novels in this thesis, the suffering of people such as the Native Americans, PTSD-suffering African American veterans, mixed-race individuals, people suffering from a wide assortment of mental conditions, women, and most disturbing of all, children. Morrison presents the picture of the cold, harsh truth, telling the story of those cast aside to the very margins of society. What gives these representations power is their raw and intimate nature, a warts-and-all approach to the depiction of trauma, and trauma induced destructive behaviour. In this thesis I have endeavoured to highlight the race relations which constitute the axel around which the plots of the selected novels revolve and which are the central pillar of the analyses conducted within the pages of this thesis. Across all three novels, the author depicts race-related societal issues present within society, issues that lingered throughout the history of the U.S. up to this very day. In the novel *A Mercy*, the time shortly before the foundation of the country we now know as the United States of America is portrayed as a period both of great opportunity but also as a chaotic time of great injustice and wanton violence. In that novel, the people who would sire the first generations of Americans are portrayed as unscrupulous, land grabbing, power-hungry slave owners personified by characters such as D'Ortega and even Jacob Vaark. Within the pages of the same novel the arrival of the first generations of African Americans is presented through Florens and all the brutality which ushered the arrival of her and others like her onto the shores of the New World. The novel paints a naturalistic picture of the exploitation of not only people like Florens, but also of Native Americans like Lina and white indentured servants like Willard and Scully, and the story is

mostly about these people doing their best to survive in a fundamentally racist, hostile and uncaring world. *The Bluest Eye* is very much a story of the descendants of people like Florens. It is the story of African American families living in contemporary United States and doing their best to maintain their way of life and persevere in the face of institutionalized racism. The MacTeers represent a modern African American family living in America and overcoming great socio-economic hardships all the while maintaining their cultural heritage and not succumbing to artificially crafted symbols and standards of success and beauty. The other family depicted in this novel are the Breedloves who represent the exact opposite. They are a collection of fundamentally broken and lost individuals who, through the destructive influence of racism and hateful racial symbolism come to despise and eventually destroy themselves. *Home* is a novel that portrays an African American war veteran's journey to save his family and find a home where they can live freely and prosper. The author depicts the lives of African Americans living in the throes of Jim Crow era segregation, where each day is haunted by the fear of sudden racial violence and death. In this vicious environment Frank Money departs on a journey of self-healing and self-forgiveness with the goal of saving his sister Cee from the clutches of an evil, racist quack hell bent on sterilising those people he finds not worthy of reproducing. Racial conflict is one of the central aspects of the story, and the author describes it in a naturalistic and raw manner from the very first pages of the novel. What makes this story different from the other two analysed in this thesis is the positive note on which it ends, with the protagonists finally managing to overcome their trauma and finding a place they can call home. The racial issues presented in these three novels are connected through their very nature. They are acts of irrational, targeted and systematic hatred towards a group, or groups, of people placed on the margins of society. The main characters within their pages often find themselves having to deal with some of the most horrific abuse one human being can inflict upon another, and their very selves are most often designated as prime targets of these attacks. What differentiates these characters are the ways in which they overcome or fail to overcome these assaults. The ultimate message behind the author's critically acclaimed depictions of such conflicts, and what I endeavoured to present within this thesis, is precisely the importance of this struggle for defence and reclamation of the self, which will ultimately yield the formation of a healthy and complete human character or the complete desolation and destruction of one.

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