I. Cultural Trauma: An Introduction

The term “trauma” refers to the action shown by the abnormal mind to the body which provides a method of interpretation of disorder, distress and destruction. Actually it is a medical term of Greek origin denoting a sever wound or injury and the resulting after effects. In defining trauma *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines it as “a mental condition caused by sever shock, especially when the harmful efforts last for a long time” (1643). Trauma approves for an interpretation of cultural symptoms of growths, wound scars on social body and its compulsive repeated action. It shows the reaction to any event result in the abnormality of the mind in an event. The abnormality is mostly psyche but is manifested in the physical level which became more stressful.

As opposed to physical or psychological trauma which involves a wound and the experience of great emotion anguished by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by any or all. While it may be necessary be felt by anyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all. While it may be necessary to establish some event as the significant “cause”, while its traumatic meaning must be established and accepted, a process which requires time, as well as meditation and representation.

Neil J. Smelser (in Alexander *et al.* 2001) offers a more formal definition of cultural trauma that is worth repeating:

> A memory accepted an publicity given credence by a relevant membership group an evoking and event or situation which is (a) leaden with negative effect, (b) represented as indelible, and (c)

> regarded as threatening a society's existence or violating one or more of its fundamental cultural presuppositions. (5)

In the current case, the phrase "or group's identity" could be added to the last sentence. It is the collective memory of slavery that defines an individual as a "race member" as Maya Angelou (1976) puts it.

In Cathy Crauth's "Psychoanalytic Theory of Trauma", it is not the experience itself that produces traumatic effects, but rather the remembrance of it. In her account there is always a time lapse, a periodical of 'latency' in which forgetting is characteristic, between an event and the experience of trauma links past to present through representation and imagination. In psychological account, this can lead to distorted identity- formation, where "certain subject portion may become especially prominent or even overwhelming, for example those of victim or perpetrator [. . .] wherein one is possessed by the past and tends to repeat it compulsively as if it were fully present"(qtd. in Eyerman 3).

At the theoretical level, it is also rooted in an event or series of events, not necessarily in series of events, but in their direct experience. Such experience is usually mediated, through newspaper, radio, or television, for example, which involves a spatial as well as temporal distance between the event and its experience. Mass-mediated experience always engages a 'meaning struggle', a grappling with an event that involves identifying the 'nature of pain', the nature of victim and the attribution of responsibility. Alexander calls this the 'trauma process' where the collective experience of massive disruption and social crisis, becomes a crisis of meaning and identity.

Like psychological or psychic trauma, the articulating discourse surrounding cultural trauma is a process of meditative involving alternative strategies and

alternative voices. It is a process that aims to reconstruct or reconfigure a collective representation, as a way of repairing the tear in the social fabric. A traumatic tear evolves the need to narrate new foundations, which includes reinterpreting the past as a means towards responses or paths to resolving cultural trauma that emerge in a specific historical content but all of them in some way or other involve identity and memory.

Cultural trauma is aloof from Freudian thinking of trauma. All Freud's thinking on trauma manifests the ambivalence regarding the significance of the historical events. Freud talks about 'sexual trauma' in *Studies in Hysteria* mentioning sexuality and several abuses as the cause of trauma. He also talks about 'War trauma' relating it with the World War I. Freud's early theory that historical women suffered from memories of sexual abuse matched the traumatic phenomenon of soldiers who too suffered from memories of an overwhelming event that they had been unable to cognitively register at the time it happened. Freud gives most significant and most complete views of trauma that can be found in *Moses and Monostheism,* a great study of Jewish history which focuses on the link between the inexplicable experiences comparing the history of Jews with structure of a trauma. The return of the event after a period of delay is the striking feature for Freud regarding the late 20th century when the world was indeed defined by historical catastrophe. The different types and sizes of war have led the turmoils of all kinds. The world develops according to the upcoming challenges and the changes. The trauma based upon Freudian interpretation of mind is somehow developed by the inner psycho of mankind. The result of trauma has become as a tool of literacy and cultural analysis.

Thus, with the overview of Freudian trauma, we come to know that Freudian trauma deals with the sexuality and sexual abuse as the cause of trauma but cultural

trauma deals with a loss of identity and meaning, a tear, in the social fabric affecting a group of people.

William Kansteiner, a popular critics in "Genealogy of a Category Mistake: A Critical Intellectual History of the Cultural Trauma Metaphor," brings the concept of trauma as employed at collective level diggers significantly and closely related to the identity and memory. The trauma is the occurrence of some serious real imagined injury with long-term psychological, political and moral consequences. The presence of violence actual or symbolic is routinely conflated with the presence of trauma, the result of that violence is summarily turned into victims. Sometime traumatic experience may be misrepresented and we can not better understand the exceptionally destructive combination of violence and identification so that trauma be first and foremost read from the perspective of the victim and only then carefully expanded to explore other borderline phenomena. In this regard, W. Kanteiner brought the reference of Mitchell and argues:

> Obviously, it is sometimes impossible to determine at what precise point political advocacy, emotional empathy or philosophical ambition beget metaphorical misrepresentation. The experience of perpetrators and some bystander of violence may still fit the trauma concept but the pleasure of spectatorship can no longer be reconciled with even the most flexible notion of trauma. Moral honesty and conceptual and historical precision demand that trauma be first and foremost read from the perspective of the victim and only then carefully, expanded to explore other borderline phenomena. (Kansteiner 214)

Collective Memory

Cultural trauma is the history of the study of memory. It is a tale of the search for a faculty, a quest for the way in which the mind-brain codes, stores and retrieves information. Only with the recent interest in language and in cultural aspect of thinking has there emerged the wider view of remembering as something that people do together, reminding themselves of and commemorating experiences which they have jointly under taken.

Radely views that history as something that is written from some point of view and can be more or les ethnocentric, but as an academic discipline, even within the constraints of nationally based institutions, its aims and especially, its rules of events, are of a different short from the collective memory of a group. At the very least, professional historical accounts can be criticized for the ethnocentrism. The very word 'Memory' denotes one's ability to remember things. It is the period of time that somebody is able to remember events happened in the past. It is not simply a personal, subjective experience. It is socially constructed and present oriented, and thus it reconfigures the experience. “Memory is one aspect of social practice” (qtd. in Eyerman 6). People filter memories according to what is meaningful in the present. Through current meanings, memories interpret the past events in people's lives as people try to make connections between past, present and future. “Memory, then, is knowledge about the past” (qtd. in Eyerman 5). Memory can be viewed as a human, cultural practice that is moral.

Gay Becker, Ken Puline and Yewoubdar Beyene, in their *Memory, Trauma, and Embodied Distress* write, memory is one aspect of social practice that can be viewed as a human, cultural practice that is moral rather than “a natural process that is technical, instrumental or intellectual" (321). Memory is never morally or rationally

neutral. Memories are powerful symbols of the self. They are immersed with individual's moral authority, their view of how life has been and should be the account of the past are culturally organized to make sense of the world and one's place within that world. And as such, memories are incomplete, reshaped interpretations to create a work that makes sense.

Memories interpret the past events as people try to make link between past, present and the probable future. "Memories of terror and violence refract the world through a lens altered by fear and mistrust and by physical and emotional pain" (321). Traumatic memories may be narrated repeatedly in an effort to bring healing and closure to the pain of remembering, it must be acknowledged, however, that the immensity of the pain and the incomprehensibility, the memories may overwhelm those embodied efforts to heal past and present.

Individual memory is not always a literal reproduction, but an effort to render the continuity in change realistic. Personal memory of events is frequently practiced in imaginative form. Imagination is both a disposition and a powerful self tool. Narrating traumatic memories is an effort to make sense not only of the past but of the present as well. In narrating the traumas they have experienced, people are trying to establish a sense of continuity between past and present and they come to terms with the ruptures in their lives and their selves. Traumatic body memories result in the fragmentation of the lived body.

Avishai Margalit, in his book *The Ethics of Memory*, talks that memory has two types: Shared memory and Common memory. For him, shared memory is experienced in different angle by individuals but common memory aggregates the memories of all those people who remember a certain episode which each of them experience individually.

Before talking about the memory, Avishai talks about the difference between ethics and morality. Ethics depends on comparisons to paradigmatic cases. So for him, ethics bases on thick and involved relations in which emotions toward the other play a major role, on the other hand morality walks in a thin rope with a very little emotion among mere human beings to keep the rope tight. He compares ethics to the litmus test and more likely to a wine test and says; “ethics might turn out, in Gilbert Ryle's metaphor, to be less like a litmus test and more like a wine testing, with its contrast comparisons to good examples. Ethics seem to be more suitable for what I have called i.e. philosophy and morality for i.e. philosophy” (38-39).
Because of the enmeshed with caring, memory belongs primarily to ethics, not to morality. So he concludes, we should take the adjective moral in the expression moral witness as systematically ambiguous between ethics and morality.

Avishai exposes at the beginning of the book that it is not about the debate on his parents about a soldier who was killed under the command of an officer. He says again, this book is not about the Holocaust but about a Philosophy. He further says, "Some philosophy starts at home. And my parents' debate hovers above the abyss of my concern with the memory and the obligations- if there is any--to remember: or for that matter, to forget and forgive” (Foreword ix). Here, he considers a question, "Are we obligated to remember people and event from the past?” (9). So far as for him, memory can be remembering or forgetting about any action or event. While talking about memory, it belongs primarily to ethics not to morality. For this he talks about the relation between memory and caring; and further says, “memory is not a necessary condition of caring and caring is not a necessary condition for memory, a conditional sense of memory is necessary of caring” (30). Caring for him, is a demanding attitude towards others, it does not necessarily require liking. So caring enhances a sense of

belongingness. Memory then blends into morality through its internal relation with caring. Caring seems to belong quite naturally to morality, so he says one should fear the plea to appraise memories in moral terms.

Cultural Trauma as a Discourse

Cultural trauma cannot be defined only as a given historical or social event at the time of its occurrence; rather, it develops into a distinct discourse during long symbolical arguments, dialogues between different groups of eyewitnesses, but also through statements from post-traumatic power-holders. For the members of every society, there are periods in the life cycle in which people are most malleable and susceptible to change, and there are historical periods in which change is endemic, regardless of where people are in their individual biographies. Thus, irrelevant of one's age or social position at the time of encountering the traumatic vortex of change, everyone through their life course is a potential participant in the discourse that takes shape after the negative events, attempting to explain and interpret the past. Discourse analysis in the sociology of culture has been more concerned with uncovering the large patterns of thought underlying the structure of whole texts or larger sets of meanings that determine social practices. Cultural trauma like any other discourse could be interpreted as a cognitive instrument developed to bind together the sets of temporally distributed memories, symbols, opinions, etc. while minding the ground text of the events that proved traumatic to the society. Discourse referred both to the interactive process and the end result of thought and communication. Discourse is the social process of making and reproducing sense(s).

Roland Barthes, in his *Mythologies* (1957), assumed that any discourse is possible only because of the set of additional structures behind the text. Those are historically produced, loosely structured as combinations of concerns, concepts,

themes, and types of statement, determining the actual use of signifiers in a particular context. The other famous poststructuralist author Michel Foucault, in his work *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) outlined that "[. . .] cultural discourse maintained both conventional ways of knowing the world and a network of power relations among those who did the knowing. Discourse amounted to certain conditions and procedures regulating how people may communicate and what and how they may know" (12). The life stories that talk about cultural trauma are framed and made commensurable by a discourse with the central topic of how one type of power relation was sharply and usually violently replaced with another type.

The discourse of cultural trauma is not an abstraction, it is a possible explanation of what has happened, created in the public sphere and stored in the collective memory. In this discourse, the traumatic event is understood to be an epiphany in the history of the community or nation, which radically alter and shape the meanings which people assign to themselves and their life prospect. Although cultural trauma is essentially a collective narrative, it is only the individual according to Eyerman who argues:

> who animates discourses by imparting to them of personal meaning; individuals personalize discourses within the context of their discrete perspectives on life, using them to make and express a personal construction of the world, a possibly original language-world, a sense particular to them at a particular time (qtd. in Eyerman 19).

In the case of value aggression not causing a discussion in the public sphere about its essence and the ways of adaptation, we cannot talk about cultural trauma as a discourse at all but by avoiding its some unusual features it is a discourse because it is created in public sphere and stored in the collective memory. The traumatic event

itself is preserved in collective memory, but often in a hidden form in the private sphere (e.g. items related to the tragic event kept in the family, photo albums and diaries, stories passed on from parents to children, protest oriented art displayed only in close-knit circles). It is quite common that collective traumas "require a time of latency before they can be acted out, spoken about, and worked through" (qtd. in Eyerman 21). After the interim 'coalition of silence'; in some later period a well-kept compendium of personal tragic experience may become the object of a public symbolical debate, thus being a 'building block' for the cultural trauma discourse.

Until the deep gashes inflicted upon cultural identities are not discussed, explained and the results are not given meaning to, cultural trauma does not exist as discourse. The trauma had always existed but simply went unrecognized by the society. The post-traumatic dialectic of remembering and forgetting is, similar to the personal level, also socially connected to two processes: the dissolution and the re-routinisation. Dissolution as a coping strategy could be defined to be the temporary drastic modification of a world-view or a sense of collective identity undertaken to avoid emotional distress, in case when excessive use of dissociation impairs the memory of the traumatic event. For instance, there were many people in the early years of Soviet Estonia (1944-53) who thought it was only natural to destroy the previous cultural heritage by deporting 'bourgeois' intellectuals and eradicating printed materials. While conducting interviews with elderly Swedish Estonians in 2001-2004, it became clear that they thought that the only Estonian way of living was what they had done in Sweden for 60 years and the homeland reality was deemed to be life in an unacceptable Other Estonia. This same moment of dissociation appeared in the biographical interviews with Estonian Russians. They often asked if it is really worth recalling their arrival into annexed Estonia when more importance should be

placed on discussions about guaranteeing their future. The second significant coping strategy consists of active attempts to establish new routines after a community has experienced a stressful event. In the aftermath of traumatic events, most survivors are engaged in the arduous process of constructing a more positive, less threatening view of the world and themselves than that implied by the extreme experience. An example of re-reutilization in Soviet Estonia is the continuing tradition of song festivals from 1947, when people used to disregard the fact that the repertoire began to focus on praise songs to the party and to Socialism. When talking about Swedish Estonians it is important to note their zeal to go on with the Estonian-inclined Boy Scouts' movement and the student fraternities in their new country of residence.

The Russian community that stayed in Estonia has of late begun to consolidate on May 9, the anniversary of the Soviet army's victory over Fascism. Rituals like carrying old war decorations, singing soldiers' songs and recalling soldiers' memories, laying flowers to the fallen, are carried out near the World War II memorials in Tallinn and Narva. Through dissolution and re-reutilization any sovereign power tries to create the image of the uniqueness of linear time, rewriting trauma time into a linear time narrative of national heroism, all the while pretending to bring security and trust. The discourse of cultural trauma proceeds on all levels of the different modes of human time, with the life stories splitting into narratives of health problems appearing during the changes or premature deaths of relatives (biological time), of hoping for the mercy of God (religious time), of the material chaos in everyday life or the troubles of managing one's life during deficit economy (economical time), of the attitude towards a sharply transformed world-view doctrine (political time), etc.

Cultural Trauma and Ethics

In general, psychologists and sociologists agree that trauma and event are separate. Trauma is an act of signification, hence something social. Jeffery C. Alexander in "Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma" stresses the social dimension even further with the notion of cultural trauma:

> Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivists feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. (Alexander 1)

Alexander gives cultural trauma an ethical dimension, although he does not explicitly use the notion ethics:

> Insofar as they [the collective] identify the cause of trauma, and thereby assume such moral responsibility, members of collectivities define their solidarity relationships in ways that, in principle, allow them to share the suffering of others. Is the suffering of others also our own? In thinking that it might in fact, societies expand the circle of the we. By the same token, social groups can, and often do, refuse to recognize the existence of others' trauma and because of their failure they cannot achieve a moral stance. [. . .] by refusing to participate in what I will describe as the process of trauma creation, social groups restrict solidarity, leaving others to suffer alone. (65)

Thus, Alexander's aim to deny that trauma is grounded in something objective (external or real) becomes a way of stressing the ethical character of the cultural

trauma process. However, one of the key questions is how to ‘expand the circle of the we’ and still withhold the ethical imperative.

The Semiotics of Cultural Trauma

The idea in Alexander’s theory is the claim that we, collectively, may choose how to represent events, "Collective actors “decide” to represent social pain as a fundamental threat to their sense of who they are" (Alexander 10). It is difficult to consider the events of, for example, mass rapes that so often are part of warfare, as being mere happenings and that we may actually choose to signify them as traumatic – this especially so when the intention behind the deeds is to create traumas, to shake, interrupt and break the identity of individuals and groups. However, in a broader perspective, when we talk about the dynamics of groups and collectives and their identity, present research argues that cultural trauma is a useful notion. Then it makes sense to talk about a construction of social meanings, of how the event is transformed and migrates into a grid of significations.

The thesis about a gap between sign and referent is well-known in (social) semiotics or cultural studies. No meanings are inherent in the object, or the event, it is always a matter of appropriation, negotiation, cultural struggle and the making of meaning.

Culture and Ethics, or, the Process of Sharing and Caring

The cultural trauma process, or what we might call, the semiotics of trauma, takes place in-between event and representation. But in order for the event to become a cultural trauma, to migrate into social significance, it has to be established as a shared value – even if we talk about a negative value as in the case of trauma. This is a process that takes time and that require agents, mediations and a community of carriers and ‘caretakers’. Thus, cultural trauma, as a social and cultural phenomenon

implies an ethics. The main concern of cultural trauma is gap between event and representation which is always not a free and open space that is accessible for intervention and agency. Some events may be so difficult and horrible that it takes an extensive time span to appropriate them (one example would be the Finnish Civil War in 1917 that could only be dealt with openly 80 years later). Thus, psychological or individual trauma – at least in part – to be outside the model and the interpretative frame that Alexander establishes.

Accordingly, the theory that Alexander establishes – and that he considers to be an empirical one – is for me a cultural perspective on dramatic events that have the potential to be made into collective traumas, into a shared past and a common memory around something that is deeply disturbing. Present researcher prefers to talk of 'perspective' instead of theory because what we face is a heuristic process where we are trying to find reasonable meanings for situations, acts and things. It is also a question of culture because trauma is used as a metaphor, it is something that is carried over – and migrating – from the discipline and domain of psychology into that of culture, or cultural anthropology and sociology of culture.

The Epistemology of Cultural Trauma

The epistemology of Cultural trauma ranges from the event and representation. One of the consequences with the idea of cultural trauma is that we have to get rid of the epistemological problem of memory. Our semiotics is instead based upon the principle of migration (we study effects of an absent event) and the question of origin or what actually happened is of no relevance. If we, on the other hand, focus on the question of the character and quality of the event and the origin, then we are moving into the domain of the morality of trauma and of memory. That is a project where we are driven by the imperative to find out what the event was like.

This is the world of the detective, the police of morality. As Margalit claims we need morality because we do not care about people in general, we care only for those we know, for those who are near us. Therefore caring is placed in a now, and so to speak localized. Consequently, to pose the question what actually happened is only important from a moral point of view. Moral, according to Margalit, is abstract and general, when ethics is material and specific. Hence, ethics presupposes a shared past, memory and community. Morality does not. A true cultural trauma process is therefore a sign for a thick relation, an ethics.

Thus, acknowledging a cultural trauma is a social form of caring. If we care for a collective that has suffered we consider their traumatic past. If we care for the moral of the trauma (for example, about what actually happened, or of whom that has the right to claim to be traumatized) we do not necessary care for the community or the victim. It is, for example, this relation between moral and ethics that the father in the classical American melodrama *East of Eden* did not understand. The righteous patriarch is incapable of caring for his sons because his primary principle of upbringing is that of morality.

The Enclosed Space of Cultural Trauma

As Margalit argues, an ethics presupposes an enclosed social space. Morality, on the other hand is unlimited. It regulates our "thin" relations, our common humanity. Morality is born out of principles and therefore the result of an act of negotiation and legislation. Margalit writes: "Morality is long on geography and short on memory. Ethics is typically short on geography and long on memory" (12). Consequently the researcher is facing a dilemma that would like to discuss in this dissertation: When facing one of the primary characteristics of today's society, migration and immigration, how to move between the open and abstract space of

morality and the enclosed space of ethics? And: how can one transgress and overcome the dichotomization of ethics and (fixed) place vs. morality and (open) space? One tentative answer could be that we in fact are talking about a process; hence our chains of signification are closed and opened up through time. The time span is important because it also implies that the cultural trauma process includes the act of forgetting as well; the absent other of memory.

Thus, all above abstracts deals with the cultural trauma which refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. *A Mercy* by Toni Morrison deals with all these aspects of cultural trauma.

II. The Study of Cultural Trauma and Quest of Identity in Morrison's *A Mercy*

A Mercy, a master piece of Morrison portrays the American scenario before the birth of slavery. The year is 1682, and the setting is somewhere in what would become Maryland or Virginia, near the cost. Rather the physical violence the memory and the quest of cultural identity is dominant factor in the novel. The quest of cultural and racial identity is depicted in the novel through the characters. Each and every character revolves under the politics of their cultural identity. Not only the cultural identity of African- American people, Morrison is successful to show the cultural quest of Native American in the novel. The quest for their identity results the cultural trauma acting upon them.

A Mercy , the latest novel of Morrison published in 2008, begins with the traumatic narration of Florens – an enslaved girl in Jacob's house, who is departed from her mother and little brother. Although Florens seems to be happy in Jacob's house where she is treated with kindness by the trader's wife Rebekka and by a slave named Lina, the memory of her mother rejection will always torture:

> I see it forever. Me watching, my mother listening, her baby boy on her him. Sennor is not paying the whole amount he owes to sir. Sir saying he will take instead the women and the girl, not the baby boy the debt is gone. A minha mae begs no. her baby boy is still at her brest. Take the girl, she says, my daughter, she says me . me sir argues and changes the balance due. (5)

The violence involved in this extract is elaborated. The expression of denial is clearly seen. Though Florens seems to be happy in Jacob's house, where she is treated with kindness by the trader's wife Rebekka and by a slave named Lina, the memory of her mother's rejection will always torture her. The denial for departing from mother is

not other than for the cultural identity that tends to show the cultural trauma acting upon her.

We hear the story next in the voice of Jacob, who is morally repelled by slavery and mostly refuses to take part in it: "Flesh was not his commodity."(20) Yes, he has accumulated a couple of slaves, but he thinks of them as Rebekka's "helpers" rather than as property. One of them, called Sorrow, he more or less adopted after she washed up on a nearby shore; the other, a Native American named Lina, he purchased "outright and deliberately, but she was a woman, not a child"(20). Lina and Rebekka, left to fend for themselves on the farm while Jacob travels, soon developed a relationship of almost-equals: “Not only because somebody had to pull the wasp sting from the other's arm. Not only because it took two to push the cow away from the fence. Mostly because neither knew precisely what they were doing or how.”(51)

Morrison shows forceful relationship between the slave and slave-owner, mainly mistress. They befriend because they need for themselves. Jacob decides to accept Florens not primarily because of her use value, but because she is the same age as his daughter, recently killed by a horse, and he hopes her presence might help to console Rebekka. Here it is clear to say that slave masters try to see their benefits from different angle. Whatever it is Jacob also buys Frorens in exchange. The co modifying mankind loses their identity and causes cultural trauma.

The African American characters in Morrison’s narrative has been presented as object like: “Which did not mean you could do business with them, and he had out-dealt them often enough, especially here where tobacco and slaves were married, each each currency clutching its parents elbow” (12). They lack their self identity and are scolded and mistreated:

> Law, court and trade were their inclusive domain and overdressed women in raised hells rode in carts driven by ten-years-old Negroes. He was offended by lax, flashy cunning of the Papists. “Abhor that arrant wore of Rome.” The entre class in the children quarter of the or house had memorized those lines from their primer. (12)

The violence involved in the elaboration is not only brutal but it points the null existence of the Negro child. The loss of identity results the cultural trauma in the extract above. Morrison’s novel *Beloved*, which relentlessly--and often excessively--depicted the brutality of slave-owners on a plantation ironically named Sweet Home, it is reassuring to see some 'Europe’s,' as the Dutch settlers are called here, who are compassionate, at least within the bounds of what is permissible in their world rather than savage for its own sake.

In the same manner, if Jacob takes on Florens partially because "if she got kicked in the head by a mare, the loss would not rock Rebekka so," it is nonetheless clear that the slaves in the Vaark’s household are treated with respect and sympathy (26). Scully, a young man who does occasional work for the Vaark, believes that Lina's loyalty to her owners is not "submission [. . .] it was a sign of her own self-worth--a sort of keeping one's word. Honor, perhaps" (26). But even the most humane of slaveowners cannot escape the stringencies of the relationship between owner and property: later Scully will realize that "the family they had imagined they had become was false"(47). It is clear that no slaves, although carefree in owners house cannot assume that they are having self identity and results the cultural trauma.

Florens, the Angolan-born slave narrator in *A Mercy*, has been bought by Jacob Varaka with the exchange of debt owed by D’Ortega, a cruel slave trader who

thinks African American people as commodity. Firstly when Jacob refuse to take her in exchange he coated ""Rediculous", said D' Ortega " you sell them. Do you know the price they garner?"(20) In response to this answer Jacob thinks that "flesh was not his commodity""(20). Although he says so but Florens was bought by him in exchange of the debt by which she has been traumatized due to the separation of her mother. The separation finally results in the cultural trauma:

> You don't seem to comprehend my offer. I not for-feeting my debt. I honouring it. The value of a seasoned slave is beyond adequate.
>
> "Not if I cant use her"
>
> "Use her? Sell her" (23)

The cruel lines above too shows the nature of cruel masters in *A Mercy*. The cultural identity of African-American has been considered as 'nothing'. They are mere goods.

Flourens, a slave girl narrates the traumatic situation when she was discarded by her own mother who says: " Please, senhor. Not me. Take her. Take my daughter" (24). Flourens remembers this scene time and again. The remembrance is the traumatic core of the novel. Morrison presents the business of slave in traumatic manner:

> They wrote new papers. Ageing that the girl was worth twenty pieces of eight, considering the number of years ahead of her and reducing the balance by three hogshead of tobacco or fifteen English pounds, the later preferred. The tension lifted, visible so on D'Ortega's face. Eager to get away and re-nourish his good opinion of himself, Jacob said abrupt goodbyes to Mistress D'Ortega, the two boys and their father. (25)

When Flourens comes to the Jacobs house she meets with Messilina as Morrison writes “they named her Messalina just in case, but shortened it to Lina to signal a sliver of hope (45). The argument here is not other than cultural identity. The name of Missalina tends to be Lina. To 'they' Morrison tends to symbolize the so called white masters.

In *A Mercy*, more than in any of Morrison's previous books, slavery is as much a metaphor for the human condition as it is a historical fact. The novel is an extended consideration of the many ways in which people deliberately or unconsciously assert ownership over each other: spouses, lovers, mothers and children. The language in which Jacob considers his requirements for a wife--an unchurched woman of childbearing age, obedient but not groveling, literate but not proud, independent but nurturing--is a slightly more tender version of the language of slave advertisements, as Morrison represents them here: "Girl or woman that is handy in the kitchen, sensible, speaks good English, complexion between yellow and black, [. . .] Hardy female, Christianized and capable in all matters domestic available for exchange of goods or specie (The latter was an advertisement for Lina.)" (48). Later we learn that Rebekka's mother thought of her marriage to Jacob as a "sale," since Jacob had emphasized "reimbursement" for the requirements for his future bride's journey, including clothing and expenses. And at the planter's house Jacob, faced with the man's insipid, preening wife, finds that "his own Rebekka seemed ever more valuable to him"(48).

The overlaps between the language of love and the language of ownership are undeniable, from the declaration of mutual ownership from the biblical Song of Solomon (which is also the title of Morrison's best novel) to the conception of sex as 'taking' or 'possession'. But while such tropes can appear to be innocent and even

romantic, what Morrison is out to demonstrate is that slavery of any kind, even the enslavement in passion, is dangerous to the soul. Florens will discover this when she falls in love with a blacksmith, a free man who comes to work on a new house that Jacob, envying the grand mansion of the planter he visited, decides to build. Their relationship is unconstrainedly erotic as Florens watches him at work, sweat runs down his back and, "I have shock at myself for wanting to lick there[. . .] My mouth is open, my legs go softly and the heart is stretching to break" (50). Florens's attraction to the man (he is never named) is depicted as a force of nature. "I wilt when you go and am straight when Mistress sends me to you," she says at one point (the portions of the book that she narrates are all addressed to him) (50). Lina tries again to caution her: ""You are one leaf on his tree." "No," Florens replies. "I am his tree""(59).

But she is not, as the book's terrible climax makes plain. When Rebekka comes down with smallpox, she sends Florens on a mission to find the blacksmith, who has since moved on, and bring him back to heal her. On the journey, Florens catches sight of a stag walking in the woods, and tastes something like freedom for the first time; “I wonder what else the world may show me. It is as though I am loose to do what I choose, the stag, the wall of flowers. I am a little scare of this looseness. Is that how free feels? I don't like it. I don't want to be free of you because I am live only with you.” (82)

This surrender will be her undoing. After she reaches the blacksmith, she discovers that he has taken in a child, a foundling discovered in a cart with his father dead on the horse. He leaves her to mind the boy while he goes to heal Rebekka. Fearing that the blacksmith has already transferred his affections to the child, Florens becomes mad with jealousy--"I can never not have you have me--and in her rage she

lashes out against him"(103). When the blacksmith returns and finds them, he hits her and sends her away:

> "Because you are a slave." ...
>
> "Sir makes me that." ...
>
> "No. You have become one."
>
> "How?
>
> "Your head is empty and your body is wild."
>
> "I am adoring you."
>
> "And a slave to that too."
>
> "You alone own me."
>
> "Own yourself, woman, and leave us be."(139)

The above cruel lines portrays the situation of slaves in the then society. The society assumes slaves as wild and empty headed that do not have rationality. Thus they lose they lose their identity and result to cultural trauma.

Of course, there are crucial differences between Florens's romantic metaphors of ownership (You alone own me) and the actualities of slavery. The lover's desire to posses the beloved--a desire that is one of love's most disturbingly primal sensations--does not deny the beloved his or her volition, does not reduce his or her humanity. More, the beloved may consent to and even welcome such assertions of mastery. In passion, the roles of master and slave are not fixed, and may be rejected altogether.

But in consent lies danger. At the end of the novel, Florens's mother gives her own version of the story, and her message to her daughter transforms slavery from the political to the personal: "To be given dominion over another is a hard thing; to wrest

dominion over another is a wrong thing; to give dominion of yourself to another is a wicked thing" (132). Notice that the first scenario, which describes Jacob's acceptance of Florens, is hard, while the second, the act of the slave-trader, is "wrong," but only the third is "wicked. Therefore, submitting to slavery--to metaphorical slavery, at least--turns out to be more dangerous than perpetrating it.

It is not entirely accurate to say that Morrison is using slavery as a metaphor for the human condition. She is using it as a metaphor for the female condition. Rebekka, en route to the New World, finds an unexpected solidarity in her female companions on the boat, all of them whores, thieves, or other pariahs. Later, as she lies feverishly in bed, fighting her illness and mourning her lost babies, the voices of the women on the ship return to her, consoling her with their stories. As she listens, she contemplates the plight of Job. Wasn't that what his comforters did, she thinks—"[t]hey told him about themselves, and when he felt even worse, he got an answer from God saying, Who on earth do you think you are?" All Job truly wanted, she realizes, was God's attention: "simply to catch His eye." (57) But he was a man. Would a female Job dare to offer up such a request? "And if, having done so, and He deigned to remind her of how weak and ignorant she was, where was the news in that? What shocked Job into humility and renewed fidelity was the message a female Job would have known and heard every minute of her life." (59)

Morrison has often made the women in her novels into female Jobs, and as they suffer torment upon torment--rape, abuse, abandonment--one sometimes wonders how much they can be expected to take, and how much relentless pain the reader can be expected to bear, before the mind is numbed out of all understanding. In *Beloved* and some of her other novels, Morrison seemed almost to take a grisly delight in the savagery. Like many chronicles of the martyrdom of saints, her prose

can become downright sadistic. In one of the most painful episodes in the new novel, Florens, midway through her journey to the blacksmith, seeks refuge for the night in a cottage inhabited by a widow and her daughter. The girl, she is startled to notice, is covered with fresh wounds, "dark blood beetling down her legs" (132). The local men have accused her of being a demon, and since it is believed that demons do not bleed, her mother must continually open the wounds to prove that she is not.

A Mercy has its expected share of bloodshed, but here the violence, filtered through Florens's dreamy monologues, is almost minimalistic by comparison. The despair about the lot of women, though, is maximal. Her prospects were servant, prostitute, wife, and although horrible stories were told about each of those careers, the last one seemed safest, Rebekka realizes on the ship. The one where she might have children and therefore be guaranteed some affection. As hard as her married life turns out to be--she loses all four of her children in quick succession, followed by her husband--she is almost certainly right. After all, there are 'restrictions' on wife-beating: "not after nine at night, with cause and not anger" (presumably slaves and unmarried women can be beaten at any hour of the day, for any reason, in any mood) (104). And the metaphor of the tree appears again to describe the love between Rebekka and Jacob, although this time in terms of greater equality: "They leaned on each other root and crown" (105).

But anyone with even a glimmer of familiarity with Morrison's fiction cannot read Rebekka's consoling thoughts about motherhood--she might have children and therefore be guaranteed some affection--without a shudder. In all of Morrison's work, there is no force so transformative or terrifying, no human relationship as deeply binding, and thus no potentially greater source of life's pain, as the love between mother and child. Fatherhood, in her world, is bizarrely--and tellingly--irrelevant.

In *A Mercy*, Sorrow, the novel's strangest and most ambiguous character, has what comes closest to a happy experience of motherhood: her first child, delivered prematurely, dies (or is left to die), but she gives birth easily to her second with the help of Scully and another farmhand, and afterward she renames herself 'Complete'. Rebekka is unhinged by the loss of her children; this once generous and practical woman turns bitter and withdrawn, and Scully remarks that she passes her days with the joy of a clock. And the heart-wrenching choice that her mother is forced to make at the novel's start determines the course of Florens's life--not only circumstantially, as she takes her place within the Vaark household, but also emotionally. The trauma of her mother's rejection of her in favor of her little brother, the baby boy still nursing at her breast, is forever in the shadows of her mind that result the cultural trauma.

"'Mother hunger', Lina calls their longing: "to be one or have one"" (109). When Florens first comes to the Vaark home and sees that Sorrow is pregnant, she feels threatened: "Mothers nursing greedy babies scare me. I know how their eyes go when they choose. How they raise them to look at me hard, saying something I cannot here. Saying something important to me, but holding the little boy's hand" (110). And later, when Florens arrives at the blacksmith's hut and feels threatened by the boy he has taken in, the pain of that formative moment returns in a dream: "A minha mae leans at the door holding her little boy's hand, my shoes in her pocket. As always she is trying to tell me something" (111).

What Florens's mother was trying to tell her fills the last chapter of the novel. Her life story is, again, one of violent, vicious treatment by men: first she is brought from Africa to Barbados and gang-raped, then she is sold to the Portuguese trader, who, she worries, has already begun to show an interest in Florens. When she sees Jacob, she trusts him immediately: "There was no animal in his heart [. .]He did not

want" (160). She begged him to take her daughter and says: "I saw the tall man see you as a human child, not pieces of eight. I knelt before him. Hoping for a miracle. He said yes" (161). In this way, an act that seemed horrible is redeemed. Like Sethe's murder of Beloved, it was a terrible demonstration of maternal love. The tragedy is not that it happened to Florens, but that she will never understand why:

> Spores of bluefern growing in the hollows along the riverbank float toward the water in silver-blue lines hard to see unless you are in or near them, lying right at the river's edge when the sunshots are low and drained. Often they are mistook for insects--but they are seeds in which the whole generation sleeps confident of a future. And for a moment it is easy to believe each one has one--will become all of what is contained in the spore: will live out its days as planned. This moment of certainty lasts no longer than that; longer, perhaps, than the spore itself. (157)

This is the mother's dream, and perhaps the primary cruelty of slavery was the near-certainty that it would be thwarted. The children of slaves, needless to say, had little chance of fulfilling any kind of a future; and slave mothers could have no confidence that the babies to whom they gave birth would become all of what is contained in the spore or would live out [their] days as planned. The moment of certainty, if it ever exists at all, is just a flicker. Sethe's mother-in-law, Baby Suggs, is able to keep only one of her eight children. Her two girls, neither of whom had their adult teeth, were sold and taken away before she could even wave goodbye. "In all of Baby's life[. . .] men and women were moved around like checkers"(Beloved 151). Similarly, in *A Mercy* Morrison portrays 'minha mae' as similar to Seth and Baby Suggs in *Beloved*, who longs for the quest of their lost daughter.

In *A Mercy*, similarly, it is only the women whose stories we learn. This may seem a kind of poetic justice for the hardships that they suffered, and we do occasionally enter the thoughts of the men in the novel; but there can be no denying that men--as true, formed characters, not as sexual objects or brutes--have often been a startling omission from the universe of Morrison's fiction. She has chosen to tell the stories of mothers, not fathers; and the choice feels vaguely ideological. The incomplete portrayal of men certainly damages many of her narratives.

If the tragedy of losing a child, through death or through circumstance, is not unique to women, Morrison wants to emphasize that for women's cultural identity, which of course it has to be. It is women who carry babies, first in their wombs and then on their backs; it is women's bodies that nourish them, the breasts metamorphosing into a kind of second umbilical cord. A man can understand intellectually what this might be like, but he cannot feel the physical compulsion that draws a woman back to her nursing baby, a sensation so powerful that, years after weaning, just to think of it stirs a phantom ache in the breasts. That love is too thick, indeed. But by rendering her men anonymous, or by not showing comparable interest in them, Morrison skims too lightly over their suffering. By ignoring the full spectrum of human experience, she does an injustice to all her characters, male and female.

At the novel's end, we learn that there is a secret room in the house where Florens has used the tip of a nail to scratch her story upon the walls. Her intended reader is the blacksmith, of course. "If you are live or ever you heal you will have to bend down to read my telling, crawl perhaps in a few places. I apologize for the discomfort" (156). This is not Florens speaking, it is Morrison, coolly piercing the narration. Under almost any other circumstances, this would be a tonal flaw, a sign of the novelist's release of control. But Morrison seems to have done this intentionally,

to startle the reader into paying extra attention to this line, which is a kind of ironic credo that resembles the loss of her own identity in the American scenario.

In fact, the writer is telling us, she sees no reason to apologize. Sometimes it hurts to read. Sometimes it hurts to write:

> There is no more room in this room. These words cover the floor. From now you will stand to hear me. The walls make trouble because lamplight is too small to see by. I am holding light in one hand and carving letters with the other. My arms ache but I have need to tell you this.... What will I do with my nights when the telling stops? Dreaming will not come again. Sudden I am remembering. You won't read my telling. You read the world but not the letters of talk. You don't know how to. Maybe one day you will learn. If so, come to this farm again, part the snakes in the gate you made, enter this big, awing house, climb the stairs and come inside this talking room in daylight. If you never read this, no one will. These careful words, closed up and wide open, will talk to themselves. (158-159)

The first purpose of writing, we are told here, is the exorcism of pain. But more than that, the act also allows Florens to find her way back to herself. The evidence is in her speech. Throughout the book, she has addressed the blacksmith humbly as 'you', never needing to use his name, the very terms of her address giving the sense of a person bowing in submission--wilting. But toward the end of this passage she straightens up, going so far as to issue a series of commands: "Come to this farm again [. . .]climb the stairs and come inside" (157). And in the last sentence he disappears entirely, leaving only her words. The entire words result in trauma namely cultural trauma.

It is a beautiful passage, in its vision and in its language, but there is something aesthetically and humanly limiting about the credo that it expresses. For the impulse to offer testimony--which is clearly what Florens is carving into the walls of her room--is essentially different from the drive to create literature. Testimony is particular, and unembarrassed by the specificity of a single individual's perspective; but literature must be less circumscribed--it must see more than one perspective, one wound. The purpose of testimony about atrocity is to bear witness to one's own suffering or to the suffering of others, so that it may be honored and commemorated. The purpose of literature is grander: not to edify, however darkly, or to establish a public cause, but to interpret the world in all its variousness and its complication.

However, it is indeed insulting to suggest that the lives and the emotions of black people are any less universal than the lives and the emotions of white people, as if a novel as rich and beautiful as *Sula* or *Song of Solomon* were somehow irrelevant to the concerns of whites simply because its characters are black. The another installment of her noble and necessary fictional project of exposing the infamies of slavery and the hardships of being African-American is shown in the novel.

The horror of the central tragedy in *A Mercy*--the mother forced to choose between her children--is not limited to the world of slavery. It can be, and it has been, imagined in virtually any totalitarian setting: the Holocaust, the Cultural Revolution, Darfur (is slavery not a crude form of totalitarianism?). Likewise, there is surely no more universalizing experience than motherhood, which unites women regardless of their origins and their circumstances. And yet, Morrison continues to insist upon her characters' separateness from 'the center', as she puts it in the, although the center has shifted: it is no longer white, but male, and especially Euro-Americans. As long as she uses her lyrical and tormented novels as vehicles for the quest of cultural identity

on the African-American and Native Americans, her artistic achievement will continue to be interrupted by the testimonial groan. The bits and pieces of life of the characters has been dominated by the grinding blade of the axe of the so-called the white masters - -Euro-Americans. All in all, Morrison is highly successful in showing the quest of cultural identity in the novel that result in cultural trauma.

III. Conclusion

A Mercy is the powerful voice of Morrison in the field of traumatic study namely cultural trauma due to the rooted suppressed cultural exploitation, racial desertion and identity crisis. All the characters way of life has been dominated by suffering, anxiety and quest for their cultural identity of African American as well as Native Americans. Their enigmatic survival, distress and idiosyncratic behave reflect the trauma acting upon them.

A Mercy, entitled by the mercy done by Jacob Varaka by taking Flourens from the 'unsafe quarter' of D' Ortega. Due to the traumatic effect in her life especially of her identity crisis, Flourens is being exceptional and unidentical girl and later women in the community. Morrison has best presented such a character that has under the shadow of traditional society and dark stain of slavery. When Flourens is taken away departing from her mother the memory of deature and her null identity in the new society results the cultural trauma. Besides Florens, Lina, Sorrow , Scully and Willard as well as the Blacksmith, a skillful and freeman seems to free from the dark shadow of slavery, he still lacks his cultural identity and is traumatized. The characters are not satisfied in what they have due to the social exploitation which is the main cause of trauma. Not only this Rebekka, is also in search for her new identity in the new land. Thus together with these woman face the trail of their harsh environment as Jacob attempts to carve out peace of himself in the brutal landscape of north of America, in the seventeenth century. The social harassment and brutality of the society results the identity crisis that in turn results the cultural trauma.

Thus the novel, *A Mercy* narrates the traumatic voice of the characters for their cultural identity which is the result of social exploitation and slavery system. The protagonist is sharing her memory by narrating her traumatic story to get rid from the

trauma. All in all, Morrison is successful in portraying the cultural trauma through her master piece.

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