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"Dama Ninao" est une revue scientifique interdisciplinaire qui accepte et publie tous les articles relevant des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines. A cet effet, elle s'intéresse aux études et théories littéraires, linguistiques, sociologiques, philosophiques, anthropologiques et historico-géographiques. La Revue "Dama Ninao", entendu "L'Entente" en langue kabyè du Nord Togo, est créée dans l'intention de matérialiser la mondialisation ou la globalisation qui s'opère avec l'esprit d'équipe et d'échanges et la désuétude du monde autarcique. Le monde scientifique universitaire ne peut échapper à cet esprit d'équipe qui fonde un creuset où « le fer aiguise le fer », les échanges se croisent, puis s'entremêlent pour aboutir à une reconstruction des connaissances scientifiques individuelles dans la collectivité.

La Revue Dama Ninao nous renvoie à la Civilisation de l'Universel du poète sénégalais Léopold Sédar Senghor, qui prône la porosité des âmes avec l'acceptation de l'autre, de ce qu'il dispose d'utile pour mon avancement : sa civilisation, sa culture, sa langue ... Elle se fonde notamment sur la philosophie de Paul Ricœur qui préconise la perception de Soi-même comme un autre. Considérer soi-même comme un autre aux yeux de l'autre, nous amènerait à faire taire nos distensions et ressentiments afin de redimensionner notre espace, reconstruire notre histoire et notre société.

La Revue Dama Ninao s'est inspirée de la nature. Des insectes en miniature nous produisent de bels chefs-d'œuvre architecturaux, conjuguent leur génie créateur et leur force dans la patience et dans la tolérance. Ils créent des œuvres monumentales qui dépassent l'entendement humain, les termitières. A cet effet, la nature semble nous parler, nous guider, nous instruire dans le silence. Seules ces créations nous interpellent sans autant faire de nous des disciples. Comme la termitière qui, pour la plupart du temps, est une composante de maillons surgissant de la même matière, la Revue Dama Ninao se veut une termitière scientifique dont les enseignants-chercheurs en sont les maillons.

Au confluent de diverses sciences, la Revue Dama Ninao se propose de promouvoir la recherche scientifique et universitaire en impulsant le dialogue

interdisciplinaire, le dialogue entre divers champs disciplinaires et divers contributeurs du monde universitaire.

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Volume : 10 à 15 pages ; interligne 1.5, police 12 pour le corps du texte et les courtes citations ; police 11 pour les longues citations, Times New Roman, les références des citations doivent être incorporées dans le texte. Exemple : Guy Rocher (1968, p. 29), pas de référence en foot-notes à l'exception de quelques commentaires.

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- Un **TITRE** en caractère d'imprimerie et en gras. Le titre ne doit pas être trop long ;
- **Nom et prénom(s)** du contributeur ou des contributeurs, **nom de l'institution** d'appartenance, **adresse mail**
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- Une **Introduction** : elle doit avoir une problématique, une méthode et une structure.
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2-1-Pour le **Titre** de la première sous-section

2-2- Pour le **Titre** de la deuxième sous-section

3- Pour le **Titre** de la troisième section (si l'auteur de l'article le souhaite)

-Une **Conclusion** : elle doit être courte, précise et concise en mettant en relief l'authenticité des résultats de la recherche.

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Les instructeurs à qui la revue affecte les articles de leur spécialité, doivent les lire avec rigueur, rejeter tout article dont le contenu est en inadéquation avec le titre et/ou dont le raisonnement n'offre pas une qualité scientifique, faire des propositions pour l'amélioration dudit article, renvoyer l'auteur de l'article à la ligne éditoriale de la revue au cas où elle n'est pas respectée. Ils se doivent notamment de vérifier, par le biais d'internet, si le même article n'est pas déjà publié dans une revue en ligne.

Objectifs et portée

La revue Dama Ninao, de par son nom qui signifie « entente », a pour objectifs :

- de matérialiser le monde universitaire qui est un creuset où « le fer aiguise le fer », les échanges se croisent, puis s'entremêlent pour aboutir à une reconstruction des connaissances scientifiques individuelles dans la collectivité ;
- de promouvoir la recherche scientifique et universitaire en impulsant le dialogue interdisciplinaire, le dialogue entre divers champs disciplinaires et divers contributeurs du monde universitaire.

La revue Dama Ninao a une portée scientifique et sociale. A cet effet, elle publie tous les articles relevant des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines et s'intéresse aux études et théories littéraires, linguistiques, sociologiques, philosophiques, anthropologiques et historico-géographiques sur appel à contribution thématique (colloque) ou varia. Elle est un espace de rencontre, de construction et de reconstruction des réseaux relationnels et scientifiques.

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Université de Lomé

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DEPICTING SLAVERY AND SOCIAL DIFFERENCES IN TONI MORRISON'S A

MERCY

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Abstract : This study analyzes two essential motifs which are slavery and social differences and how they are interrelated in Toni Morrison's novel *A Mercy* (2008). Through an insightful analysis, the main objective of this paper highlights the depiction of slavery and social differences through characters' experiences, narrative structure, and symbolism. To achieve this, the paper turns around two main questions which focus on how Morrison represents slavery not only as a physical condition, but as a psychological and social structure, and how race, class, and gender construct a difference between the characters. The answer to these questions leads us to organize this paper into three parts including slavery as a system of domination; the psychological and emotional dimension of enslavement and social differences due to slavery, in the lens of sociocriticism.

Keywords : Slavery, social differences, humiliation, domination, discrimination, rejection.

Résumé : L'esclavage et les différences sociales sont les objectifs clés de ce travail qui met surtout l'accent sur ces deux notions et comment elles se rejoignent dans le roman *A Mercy* (2008) de Toni Morrison. Dans une analyse approfondie, cet article vise principalement à décrire, à travers les personnages, la structure narrative et le symbolisme, l'esclavage et les différences sociales. Pour y parvenir, notre étude tourne autour de deux questions majeures qui insistent sur comment Morrison présente l'esclavage, non seulement comme une condition physique, mais comme une structure psychologique et sociale; et comment la couleur de la peau, la classe et le genre constituent une différence entre les personnages. La réponse à ces préoccupations nous amène à organiser notre travail en trois parties dont: l'esclavage comme un système de domination, la dimension psychologique et émotionnelle de l'esclavage et les différences sociales liées à l'esclavage; à la lumière de la sociocritique.

Mots-clés : Esclavage, différences sociales, humiliation, domination, discrimination, rejet.

Introduction

Developing the notion of slavery as an unavoidable and central theme in her well-known novel *A Mercy* (2008), Toni Morrison evokes the aspects of masters and enslaved relationships. She also largely evokes the question of economic power (wealth), race, and gender as far as the social status of the characters is concerned.

In *A Mercy*, Morrison situates her narrative in a liminal historical moment, a space before the codification of slavery, when some peoples existed within an unstable social order defined by religion, gender and economic dependency rather than by personal opportunities. In this world of uncertainty, the novel explores the human costs of survival, belonging, and exclusion, interrogating how individuals navigate a system that gradually transforms difference into hierarchy. Through her poetic and historical reconstruction, Morrison illuminates the brutal genesis of social inequalities in colonial America and exposes the ideological origins of slavery as both an economic and immoral enterprise.

The novel centers on the life of Jacob Vaark, an Anglo-Dutch trader and landowner in Virginia, and the various members of his household: Florens, an enslaved African girl; Lina, a native American servant; Sorrow, a mixed-race girl of obscure origins; and Rebekka, Jacob's English wife. Each of these characters embodies a distinct position within the emerging colonial society, and their relationships reveal the formation of a social order rooted in both dependency and exclusion. *A Mercy* (2008) represents slavery not merely as a system of physical domination but as a process of cultural and ideological construction. The novel demonstrates that enslavement is both external and internal: it shapes the material world and the consciousness of those who experience it. As Morrison writes, "To be given dominion over another is a hard thing; to wrest dominion from another is a wrong thing", Morrison (2008, p. 46). This moral paradox lies at the heart of Morrison's freedom while it builds on subjugation. That is why one of the fundamental questions in this paper will be how does Morrison represent slavery not only as a physical condition but as a psychological and social structure? In so doing, Morrison does not confine her art of writing to the economic exploitation of Africans. Instead, she reveals how the institution of slavery emerges from the intersection of economic necessity, patriarchal authority, and religious hypocrisy. Despite her reluctance to trade in human beings, ultimately she becomes complicit in a system of ownership that she cannot fully reject. Her estate, with its unfinished mansion – a symbol of ambition and moral decay – embodies the contradictions of colonial enterprise. As Florens reflects, "It is not the chains but the caring that I fear", Morrison (2008, p. 89). Through such reflections, Morrison exposes the moral ambiguity of mercy itself – the novel's central motif.

Let us underline that in the novel, the categorization between white indentured servants, African slaves, and Native women is not yet fully defined, but the emerging patterns of

discrimination foreshadow the institutional racism of later centuries. Rebekka's position as a white woman offers her relative privilege, yet she remains economically and socially dependent on her husband. Lina, the Native American servant, embodies the loss of indigenous culture and the moral burden of survival within a colonized world. Morrison's narrative shows that the boundaries separating free and unfree, civilized and savage, human and nonhuman are not natural but constructed by ideology and power. It is in this context that the second question is fundamental: how do race, class, gender construct a difference between the characters? This question is welcome because it permits us to question how Toni Morrison depicts slavery and social differences in her novel *A Mercy*.

Based on the hermeneutic approach, the larger project of this work is therefore to analyze the depiction of slavery and social differences through characters' experiences, narrative structure and symbolism; supported by sociocriticism as the approach throughout the novel *A Mercy* by Toni Morrison. In applying sociocriticism, *A Mercy* (2008) allows not only the understanding of the novel as an historical work, but also as a discourse on power, ideology and social structure. Sociocriticism, as developed by theorists such as Lucien Goldmann, Pierre Macherey, and Edmond Cros, examines the relationship between literary texts and the societal entities. It views literature as a social product that both reflects and critiques the ideological structures of its time. From this perspective, *A Mercy* (2008) can be read as a textual space where the contradictions of early American society are dramatized and deconstructed. Morrison's writing does not merely reproduce history, it reimagines it, highlighting the invisible mechanisms that generate social differences and sustain systems of oppression. In *A Mercy* (2008), the ideologies of freedom, religion, and ownership collide, revealing how the language of salvation and civilization conceals the violence of servitude and exclusion.

Incidentally, a sociocritical reading of *A Mercy* (2008) reveals that Morrison's portrayal of slavery and social differences is not confined to historical representation but extends to the symbolic and ideological dimensions of human existence. The novel portrays the colonial world as a crucible in which power, faith, and survival intertwine, giving birth to a social order founded on inequality and exclusion.

Through her intricate narrative, Morrison invites readers to confront the moral foundations of American society and recognize that the legacies of slavery and social hierarchy

continue to shape the present. *A Mercy* (2008), in this sense, becomes not only a story about the past but a meditation on the social structures that define humanity itself.

I – Slavery as a system of domination in *a mercy*

In *A Mercy* (2008), Toni Morrison explores the origins of colonial America by putting the invisible historical figures at the center of her fiction. These figures include slavery, women, servants and mixed-blood people. Situated in the late seventeenth century, the novel highlights a period where distinction between slavery and bondage was not clearly established, but where domination structures already existed. Through Florens's record, a young African slave, and the female characters such as Rebekka, Lina, and Sorrow, Morrison shows the evolution of a social system, based on skins, races and gender hierarchical structure.

In Morrison's novel, slavery first appears as a system of psychological and physical domination, where physical enslavement is accompanied by a self-deprivation. Florens, bought by Jacob Vaark embodies this double alienation: although her master appears less cruel than others, she remains a piece of property, an object of transaction. Morrison writes: "one chance, he thought. One offer. He could own a human being for nothing", Morrison (2008, p. 25). This passage illustrates the banality of domination: owning a human being becomes an economic gesture, a sign of masculine and colonial success. Florens, in turn, internalizes this logic of subjugation. In her passionate relationship with the free blacksmith, she confuses love with submission: "I am become wilderness but I am also Florens", Morrison (2008, p. 135). Her search for freedom passes through another person's gaze, revealing the psychological power of domination, the external master becomes an inner master. Morrison thus shows that slavery goes beyond physical constraint to become a process of identity formation based on dependence. This idea echoes Orlando Patterson's theory in *Slavery and Social Death* (1982), which defines slavery as a "form of permanent, violent domination of natal alienation". Through Florens's fragmented voice, Morrison evokes this slow death of subjectivity imposed by domination resulted from slavery.

This domination also extends to gender and family, where women whether white, black, or indigenous suffer under the same principle of subjugation. Rebekka, Jacob Vaark's wife is nothing more than a good exchanged, "a gift, a contract, a debt repaid", Morrison (2008, p. 78). This contractual view of the woman reproduces the logic of possession that underlies the slave system. In *A Mercy* (2008), women live in a world where their value is linked to their

reproductive or domestic usefulness. Lina, the Native American servant, sees her culture destroyed and her body extremely tired. *A Mercy* helped understand that colonial power rests on a double control: that of women's bodies and that of black bodies. In *Women, Race, and Class* (1981), Angela Davis sees slavery as the place where the convergence between patriarchy and capitalism was first experimented. Morrison illustrates this historical truth through the daily lives of the Indian women who find spaces of autonomy only in solidarity and speech. Their exchanges, silences, and prayers become symbolic forms of resistance against the masculine and colonial structure of domination. Through them, *A Mercy* (2008) broadens the notion of slavery to make it a universal condition of powerlessness and deprivation of freedom.

Meanwhile, Morrison goes further: she shows that colonial domination is nourished by a religious ideology and morality that justify it, as well as slavery. People sees religion as a means of order and cohesion, but in reality, it shows itself as an instrument of power that ranks beings in the name of God. Rebekka, after her husband's death, finds in puritanism an explanation for suffering: "she found in God's wrath a reason for the world's hierarchies", Morrison (2008, p. 122). This sentence summarizes Morrison's critique of religion: the injustice, violence and social disorder that religion had set among peoples as a moral rule. The Christian ideology, misinterpreted, becomes a machine that produces justification for domination; even mother-child love, what is seen as sacred and natural instinct, are corrupted by this system. When Florens's mother begs the Portuguese master, "please, senhor. Take her. Take my daughter", Morrison (2008, p. 35), people often consider this gesture as betrayal, but in reality, it an act of resistance and lucidity. She chooses to sacrifice proximity to give her daughter a chance of survival, a proof that means, being dominated does not completely destroy moral capacity. Morrison thus transforms an apparent act of submission into a desperate cry of love against the slave order. Thus, Morrison depicts, in her novel, the true face of religion in the America of slavery, rendering the text a critical mirror of the symbolic structures that made slavery possible. So, from a sociocritical perspective, this episode reveals how Morrison's fiction echoes historical and religious discourses of domination.

The whole novel therefore reveals the systemic nature of domination. Slavery is not an accident but a form of world organization in which some possess the power to "define" humanity. The narrator states: "In this new world, definitions belonged to the definers not- to the defined", Morrison (2008, p. 190). She affirms that the true power of domination lies in

language and in the ability to define the other. To possess the right to name, to classify, and to exclude is to establish a system of domination more durable than physical violence. Through *A Mercy* (2008), Morrison thus rewrites the genesis of America not as a story of freedom, but as a story of symbolic conquest where the fact of dominating becomes the founding principle. From its origins, slavery manifests itself as a total system - economic, ideological, sexual, and spiritual.

At the end of this first part of this paper, we noticed that *A Mercy* (2008) is not only a novel that reveal historical facts, it is a real masterpiece that calls for daily consciousness. Morrison shows how domination, before being racial, is a social structure that infiltrates all human relationships. Through the voices of women reduced to silence, she gives life back to the forgotten ones of history and denounces the birth of a world founded on possession. Through the lens of sociocriticism, we understand that the text connects literary fiction with the sociohistorical realities of the seventeenth century: the novel becomes a critique of the symbolic foundations of the American society. Slavery in *A Mercy* (2008) is far more than a narrative background, it is the mirror of a global system of domination that continues to shape human relationships. Through her poetic and fragmented writing, Morrison reminds us that slavery is not only the fact of chaining people physically; it is also and above all the fact of harming individuals' psychological and emotional abilities.

II – Psychological and emotional dimension of enslavement

Toni Morrison's *A Mercy* (2008) is not only a historical story about slavery in the seventeenth-century America but also a deep psychological exploration of how enslavement affects the human mind and emotions. Morrison shows that slavery is not just a physical condition where people are owned; it is also a mental and emotion experience that destroys identity, love, and freedom. The novel focuses on Florens, a young enslaved African girl, and other women like her, who live under the power of men and the realities that colonization and slavery established as a systemic social order. Through her writing, Morrison invites readers to feel the pain, confusion, and emotional damage caused by slavery. Using the lens of sociocriticism, we can see how Morrison connects the personal suffering of her characters to the larger social system of domination developed above.

First, enslavement comes as an element of the distortion of love and identity. Indeed, from the beginning, Morrison shows how slavery shapes the way Florens understands love and

freedom. Florens's first words, "One question is who is responsible?" Another is "can you read?" Morrison (2008, p. 1), suggest confusion and a search for meaning. As an enslaved child, she was given away by her mother to the trader Jacob Vaark. That act poses two questions: "who is responsible, her mother or the trader Jacob Vaark?", "who is supposed to mention love in his action, her mother or Jacob Vaark? She seems not to understand slavery or she makes the confusion between love, freedom and submission. She did not realize her mother's situation, whether she has the possibility to refuse. Later, when she meets the blacksmith, she begs him, "Own me, she says. Free me", Morrison (2008, p. 160). This contradiction shows that slavery has psychologically impacted slaves' existence: Florens cannot imagine love without ownership. She wants to be possessed because she has never known love outside of possession. Morrison uses this paradox to show how the system of slavery damages the ability to love freely. Under the slave system, emotional needs become tied to control and domination. The enslaved person learns to find value only when "owned", and this becomes a form of psychological enslavement even after the chains are gone.

Through Florens's voice, Morrison explores the mind of a person who has been taught that her body and feelings belong to others. The more Florens desires love, the more she loses her sense of self. Her words "I forget me too", Morrison (2008, p. 83) express the deep fragmentation of identity. The slave condition destroys not only social status but also self-awareness. This emotional confusion is not just personal; it is the result of a society that defines humans as property. From a sociocritical view, Morrison uses Florens's story to reveal how the colonial world creates emotional dependence and internalized oppression. Slavery, she suggests, is not just about chains on the body, it is in reality chains on the heart and the mind.

In addition, the maternal trauma and emotional loss created by slavery can be taken into account as far as women's acts towards their own relatives is concerned. Towards the end of the story, Florens' mother and her plea, play a determining function in understanding how mothers are affected by slavery as a system. Her plea "Please, senhor. Not me. Take her. Take my daughter", Morrison (2008, p. 37) is one of the most emotional scenes in the novel. To the reader, it seems cruel that a mother gives away her child. She did not willingly give her away. Later Morrison shows that it was an act of protection. In fact, she did not want her child to suffer the realities she had undergone; rape and mistreatment from the master. By doing so, the mother's decision is a real mercy. She wants to save Florens from the sexual abuse that she

herself suffers. Yet this act of mercy becomes for Florens a lifelong emotional wound. She grows up believing her mother abandoned her. This separation illustrates how slavery destroys the mother-child natural bond.

In many of Morrison's works, especially *Beloved* and *A Mercy* (2008), she explores how slavery breaks family connections and creates intergenerational trauma. In *A Mercy* (2008), the mother's love turns into guilt, and the daughter's memory turns into pain. The psychological dimension here is twofold: the mother suffers from emotional guilt, and the daughter suffers from emotional emptiness. Morrison makes us see that the system of slavery attacks the emotional foundation of human life, love, family, and belonging. The emotional trauma becomes part of the character's identity.

From a sociocritical perspective, this separation reflects the violence of the slave society in which human relationships are governed by ownership and trade of human beings; in regard to what happened between Florens's mother and Jacob Vaark. Thus slave trade forces enslaved people to accept the breakdown of family ties. Morrison's writing, therefore, criticizes the society that forces women to choose between love and survival. The misunderstanding of the mother by her daughter represents the impossible choices created by cruel social system. It shows that the emotional suffering of the enslaved continues even in moments meant to protect or to love.

Moreover, the psychological and emotional dimension of enslavement can be seen through cultural loss, conducting to a loss of self. In clear, Morrison also uses the characters Lina, Sorrow, and Rebekka to show the emotional dimension of enslavement and the colonization of the Indians. Lina, a Native American servant, remembers the destruction of her village: "Lina remembered the burning of her village and the death of her people", Morrison (2008, p. 55). Her survival is marked by loneliness and silence. She becomes a caretaker for others but remains emotionally isolated. Her loss is not only physical, it is the loss of culture, language, and belonging. Through Lina, Morrison shows that enslavement and colonization are forms of cultural trauma that destroy the emotional fabric of communities.

Sorrow, another enslaved woman, carries her own form of mental confusion. She is described as "half mad", living between imagination and reality. Her name itself symbolizes emotional damage. Through her, Morrison portrays how slavery leaves psychological scars that

affect even the sense of reality. These women are connected to each other by their pain and their silence. They form a community that just survive.

Rebekka, the white mistress, also experiences emotional dependency. Without the care of her enslaved women, she could not survive: “Without Lina’s care and Sorrow’s milk, Mistress would have died”, Morrison (2008, p. 82). Even though she has social power, she depends emotionally on those she owns. Morrison shows that slavery corrupts emotional relationships for the master and everything that is related to him; creating a world in which love, care, domination and fear depend on who you are dealing with.

This society reflects the early American colonial world, a world built on inequality and exploitation in which emotional ties are shaped by ownership and race. The character’s emotions are not private feelings but reflections on an unforgettable historical trauma. The novel becomes a social mirror, showing how the system of slavery dehumanizes powerless people, turning emotional connections into tools of power.

Finally, this part helps us know, in *A Mercy* (2008), that Toni Morrison presents slavery as something that creates conditions of fear, shame, loneliness in the characters, and distorts sense of love. Through Florens’s voice, Morrison reveals how the enslaved internalize their oppression until they can no longer separate freedom from being possessed. Through the mother’s sacrifice, Morrison shows how love becomes both salvation and pain. Through Lina and Rebekka, she demonstrates that slavery poisons all human relationships, even those not in chains. By using sociocriticism, we understand that these emotional wounds are not individual problems but reflections of the cruel social order of slavery and colonization. Morrison’s novel invites reader to recognize that the true horror of slavery lies not only in physical suffering but also in the invisible wounds, the loss of identity, the silence of mothers, and the broken meaning of love. *A Mercy* (2008) teaches us that healing begins when we remember and tell these hidden stories of emotional survival.

III – Social differences due to slavery

Toni Morrison’s *A Mercy* (2008) explores the beginnings of racial and social inequalities in colonial America through the lives of people who are direct victims of slavery and servitude. Set in the seventeenth century, the novel presents a society in the process of making its policies of slavery, of race, gender, and class. In this new world, freedom and

dependence are deeply connected, and each character's position is defined by their relation to property and power.

From the beginning of *A Mercy* (2008), Morrison presents slavery as a force that creates visible and invisible social boundaries. The protagonist, Florens, says, "They say I am nothing because I am a slave girl", Morrison (2008, p. 43). Her words show that slavery determines her identity and her worth. In the social environment, a person's social value depends on whether they are free, enslaved, white, black, or mixed. Sociocriticism helps us see that Florens's feeling of "nothingness" is not only psychological but social, it reflects how institutions and social norms shape human conditions, conforming Pierre Macherey, , a main figure of sociocriticism, when he considers literature as a revelation of all hidden contradictions of the society. Morrison's novel does exactly that: it uncovers how a young girl like Florens grows up believing that her life has no meaning outside servitude. Her voice becomes the mirror of a society that defines difference and power through ownership. The house where she lives clearly paints the conditions in which enslaved live in the 17th century America: Jacob Vaark as master, Florens as the enslaved girl at the bottom of the scale.

Jacob Vaark's role in the novel reveals another aspect of social difference: the contradiction between moral ideas and economic power. Morrison writes that: "He wanted land, not slaves", Morrison (2008, p. 33). Yet his wealth depends on the slave-based economy. He buys enslaved labor indirectly and benefits from trade with a slave plantation in Barbados. Through sociocriticism, we can read this contradiction as a reflection of true capitalism that needs slavery even while pretending to reject it. Jacob represents the emerging white middle class that claims to seek freedom and prosperity that are unfortunately confiscated by social inequalities. As critic Terry Otten explains in *The Moral Vision of Toni Morrison*, "vaark's moral distance from slavery is an illusion; his comfort depends on the suffering of others", Otten (2020, P. 118). Morrison thus exposes how social difference is not only personal but structural rooted in economic and moral hypocrisy. Even those who think they are free of the system remain part of it.

Rebekka Vaark, Jacob's wife, shows how gender and class interact to produce complex social differences. As a white woman, she has privileged Florens and Lina, but she still suffers from patriarchal domination. Rebekka's situation shows that while race determines one's social level, gender determines one's social mobility. From a sociocritical point of view, Morrison

reveals the patriarchal system as another form of social slavery. Rebekka's position shows how oppression crosses racial lines and affects everyone, though differently. Jean Wyatt, in her article "A Mercy, A Mother's Mercy: Maternal Love and the Slave System", argues that Morrison "links female suffering across races to show how patriarchy and slavery cooperate to sustain inequality", Wyatt (2011, p. 138). Rebekka's hardness grows after Jacob's death. She begins treating her servants cruelly. This illustrates how victim can become agents of domination once they hold power. In fact, Rebbeka was dominated by her husband whose death, as the legitimate wife, became the new mistress. Thus, Morrison depicts social differences due to slavery as a cycle of oppression that is repeated through power and fear.

The experiences of Lina and Sorrow reveal another dimension of social difference in *A Mercy* (2008), that of cultural and racial otherness. Lina, a Native American survivor of a destroyed tribe, says: "We never shape the world, the world shapes us", Morrison (2008, p. 71). This sentence based on Indians' view of the relation between nature and human beings captures the feeling of displacement that defines non-white lives in colonial America. Her social status is ambiguous: she is neither enslaved nor free, but permanently dependent on her white masters. From a sociocritical view, Morrison uses Lina's voice to represent the silent indigenous presence in early America. Philip Page, in *Dangerous Freedom: Fusion and Fragmentation in Toni Morrison's Novels*, observes that Morrison "makes the Native woman a witness to both the violence of conquest and the fragility of freedom", Page (1995, p. 152). Lina's position in the Vaark household mirrors the erased history of Native Americans visible yet powerless, necessary yet despised. Similarly, Sorrow, a mixed-race servant with unclear origins, is rejected by everyone. Rebekka calls her "simple" and "unclean", while Lina distrusts her. Sorrow's racial difference shows how mixed identities are socially excluded because they do not fit into the clear categories of people: being black, Indian or white, free or enslaved. Caroline Rody, in "Impossible Purities and the Postcolonial Impulse", explains that "Morrison writes Sorrow as the embodiment of colonial anxiety about racial purity", Rody (2010, p. 437). Through these two women, Morrison demonstrates that slavery's social effects go value and belonging in colonial society.

In *A Mercy* (2008), Morrison uses the tools of fiction to expose the historical foundation of American social hierarchy. Her narrative structure, multiple voices from different social positions serves as a sociocritical mapping of early colonial society. Each character

represents a class, a race, or a gender role, and together they form a miniature version of America's social formation. The word "mercy" of the title can be understood as a call for human consciousness to revisit the conditions of her whole life; a life marked by suffering, mistreatment and rape. It is that kind of life she refuses her daughter to live. That is why she prefers to give her up. So her mother's sacrifice can be seen as an act to save her from a cruel master. Here, the mother's sacrifice shows that slavery offers no choice but requires sacrifice, sometimes to save those one loves. *A Mercy* (2008) reveals how human relationships are shaped and limited by the social system that defines them.

At the end of this last part, we keep in mind that *A Mercy* (2008) shows that social differences due to slavery are not only historical facts but also deep moral and emotional realities. Through characters like Florens, Jacob, Rebekka, Lina, and Sorrow, Morrison reconstructs the early American world as a place where inequality was naturalized and transmitted through everyday life. Using the sociocritical lens, we understand that the novel is both a story of individuals and a critique of the society that produced them. Slavery in *A Mercy* (2008) is not just a background, it is the structure that organizes human relations, creating hierarchies of color, class, gender. Morrison's narrative thus becomes a mirror reflecting how social power works: it divides, defines and dehumanizes. Yet by giving voice to those who were silenced, Morrison transforms history into moral reflection. Her work reminds readers that the roots of social inequality lie in the very foundation of the American past, and that understanding these origins is necessary to imagine a more just and human world.

Conclusion

We can conclude that the theme of slavery and social differences is constantly present in the novel of Toni Morrison that has been the object of our study. Through the lives of the different characters, the writer has provided a vivid portrayal of slavery and social differences in the context of the 17th century America. *A Mercy* (2008) by Toni Morrison has provided substance to analyze slavery and the inequalities which existed in America at this time.

The novel offers a profound and multidimensional exploration of slavery and its deep-rooted effects on both individuals and society. Through her complex narrative and polyphonic voices, Morrison reconstructs the origins of American slavery not merely as an economic system, but as a social and psychological order that shaped early colonial life. Across the novel,

she portrays slavery as a system of domination, a psychological imprisonment, and a generator of enduring social hierarchies.

First, slavery in *A Mercy* (2008) functions as a system of domination, both physical and ideological. Morrison exposes how power was institutionalized through ownership, violence, and the denial of humanity. Characters like Jacob Vaark and D'Ortega represent contrasting models of early slaveholding, one moralistically detached, the other openly exploitative, yet both contribute to the normalization of domination. When creating Florens, Sorrow, and Lina, Morrison expects to reveal how bodies and identities become sites of control. Enslavement is not just a personal condition but a social structure that establishes racial and gender hierarchies serving colonial capitalism.

Second, the novel highlights the psychological and emotional dimension of enslavement. Morrison delves beyond physical bondage to unveil how slavery distorts the inner world of its victims. Florens's obsessive attachment to the blacksmith and her haunting need for recognition demonstrate the emotional scars of displacement and dehumanization. Lina's trauma of cultural erasure and Sorrow's fragmented sense of self further embody the lasting wounds of slavery. The novel therefore portrays slavery as a trauma that invades memory, language, and love, a psychological captivity that continues even in apparent freedom. From a sociocritical perspective, Morrison exposes the ideological violence that molds consciousness, showing how enslaved individuals internalize social inferiority and struggle to reconstruct a sense of identity and belonging.

Finally, Morrison examines social differences due to slavery, depicting a world fractured by race, class, gender, and origin. In *A Mercy* (2008) hierarchy operates not only between masters and slaves but also among the marginalized. The divisions between African, Native American, and European women demonstrate how oppression is diversified through color, culture, and religion. Morrison reconstructs the early American society as a place of fragile coexistence where social mobility is rare and identity is constantly negotiated. The characters' differing degrees of dependence and exclusion illustrate how slavery created first outlines of American social inequality a system where freedom and bondage, privilege and deprivation, coexisted as structural opposites.

Therefore, *A Mercy* (2008) transcends the historical narrative of slavery to reveal its totalizing impact on the human condition. Through her subtle yet powerful prose, Morrison

illustrates slavery as an institution of physical domination. In the novel, it also stands as a psychological and social construct that shaped the foundations of American identity. The novel dismantles the illusion of moral innocence surrounding colonial America, showing instead how domination, trauma, and inequality were intertwined in the making of the “New World”. By merging historical insight with emotional truth, Morrison restores voice and dignity to those silenced by history, offering readers both a literary and sociocritical reflection on the origins of oppression and the enduring struggle for humanity.

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