T.C.

İSTANBUL YENİ YÜZYIL UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE PROGRAMME

THE ABJECTION OF THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE FIGURE AND THE STATE OF BEING CAST OFF THROUGH MORRISON'S *BELOVED* AND *PARADISE*

MA THESIS

Hajir Talib Mahdi

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ISTANBUL, September 2021

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In the name of God, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful, and Praise be to Allah, who has helped and guided me through the years of my study.

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İSTANBUL, 2021 Hajir Talib Mahdi

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ÖZET

Bu çalışma, köleliğin kaldırılmasından kaynaklanan "iğrenç" siyah kadın figürünün basmakalıp imgesinin başlangıcına bakmayı amaçlıyor. Bu imgenin, özgürleşme sonrası dönemde değişmesine rağmen iğrenç haliyle kalması ve Toni Morrison'ın *Beloved* and *Paradise* başlıklı romanlarının incelenmesi çalışmaları aracılığıyla keşfedilmiştir. Bu metinler, iğrenilen ve bu nedenle tiksindirici olarak kabul edilen kadınların hayatlarını araştırıyor. etraflarındaki beyaz kültürden ırksal ve kültürel farklılıkları nedeniyle ötekileştirilen bu kadınlara yapılan ayrımcılık akabinde cinsel, kültürel ve ekonomik birçok başka ihlale neden olmuş ve bu da Afro-Amerikan kadın figürünün sancılı bir biçimde a bir basmakalıp haline gelen ırkçı imgesinin oluşumuna katkıda bulunmuştur. Üstelik çoğu zaman böylesi bir iğrenme çemberi ile sınırlanan Afrikalı-Amerikalı kadınlar, tamamen siyah bir toplumda da tiksinti duymalarıyla sonuçlanmıştır.

Bu çalışmanın temel amacı, onların yolculuğunu yukarıda bahsedilen Toni Morrison metinleri yardımıyla sunarak bu romanlardaki kadınlardan nasıl siyah ve kadın oldukları için iğrenildiğini açıkamaktan ibarettir. *Beloved* romanıyla kölelik dönemi bağlamında iğrenç kavramı ele alınmış, *Paradise* romanıyla ise Afro-Amerikalı kadınların, özgürleşme sonrası, tamamen siyah toplum içinde bile nasıl iğrenç bir statü altında yaşamaya devam ettiğini göstermeyi amaçlanmıştır.

Hajir Talib Mahdi, 2021

Anahtar Sözcükler: İğrençlik, Ötekilik, Tiksindirici Öteki, Basmakalıp İmgeler, Kadının Statüsü, Eşik Alanı, Kadınlık, Kimlik.

ABSTRACT

This study will look at the inception of the stereotypical image of the abject black female figure created from the degradation of slavery. The image will change but remain in its abjected form through the post-emancipation period and will be explored through the works of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* and *Paradise*. These texts explore the lives of women who have been abjected and thus are considered repulsive. They have been othered for their racial and cultural differences from the white culture surrounding them. This discrimination in turn created many other violations, sexual, cultural and economic, that added to the racist stereotypical images of the African American female figure that became a painful cliché. Confined to a circle of abjection that more often than not restricted them to this image, African-American women might well become abjected in an all-black society.

The principal objective of this study is to present their journey with the aid of the Toni Morrison texts mentioned above, and this paper will elucidate how women within these novels have been abjected for being black and women. Beloved will express abjection within the slavery period, and Paradise will show how African-American women continued to live an abject status, even within the post-emancipation, all-black society seen in the novel Paradise.

Hajir Talib Mahdi, 2021

KeyWords: Abjection, otherness, the repulsive other, stereotypical images, women's status, liminal space, womanhood, identity.

INTRODUCTION

Theoretical and Historical Background

From the discovery of the New World, European colonialization subjugated and enslaved, establishing an abusive system that abjected the native peoples and the Africans who were soon to arrive. The destruction of indigenous cultures and traditions and the death of many of these people through enslavement or disease followed. it was and is a hand on the pressure points of the jugular, the effects of which are still felt. The “legacy of colonialism has continued to have a massive impact on the fortunes of African nations and their people” (Omolewa, 2007). Slavery also deeply affected the lives of Africans people and caused the shattering of their lives and traditions, leaving a deep, infected wound in many countries, the United States among them, -“After they were imported to America from their culturally fortified home in Africa, continuously they have been un-homed. This new home-America, in turn, happens to be a space of torture, racial discrimination and exploitation instead of protection and safety.” (Bhandari, 2013). Many people died as a result of the system they encountered from causes other than being forced to leave their country, Under the threat of death or the whip, many died before they could get their freedom back.

Colonialism affected women the most of all through various ways. Thrust into a critical position through and after colonialism, African women were prone to what has been called double and triple colonization (Dube, 1999). They were not only oppressed by the patriarchal system but also for their position as colonized figures. This colonization caused these women to suffer abjection and the violation of their bodies and rights because, other than the encountering of cultural and societal norms which restricted them to a certain gender role or certain stereotypical images, they

also became colonized. Added to these violations, the stereotyping of their lives forced these African women to experience the consequences of that racism. Beaten, tortured, sexualized, objectified, raped, stereotyped, and abjected, they were deprived of the simple human right to be no man's puppet: to have a family, to keep their biological children, to have a range of choices not picked by their colonizers.

After the emancipation, these women did not have an "ordinary" life as they might have hoped and had to face, along with the demands of both the black and white communities, the typecast role proposed on them as former slaves that occluded the perfect images that some black societies have created for themselves. These women experienced a structure based on principals of abjection that had been forced them to be the other. The abject, the repulsive figure as "colonialism thrived on constructing 'essential' identities and suppressing differences" (Dube, 1999). African women became the representation of various kinds of violations and had to bear the terrible consequences of these categorizations within the context of the patriarchal system.

The abjection of the African American women caused them great damage as the many mental and physical maladies brought on by the institution of slavery stayed with them even after emancipation. Their abjected position was a serious issue affecting their lives and the lives of generations as they traversed the post-emancipation period and found themselves facing the stereotypical images of their sexuality propagated through slavery in white society—the stereotypical image of a righteous housewife and mother in all-black society up to the present day, those it's true that the contemporary generation has access to various means that allow for its liberation as no generation has before.

Perhaps no writer has done more than Toni Morrison to expose these false images to the public. As one of the most distinctive and accomplished African-American writers, she has made it part of her life's work to present the critical issues in which African-American people confront their history, culture and lives in the United States. Having been awarded the Nobel Prize, Morrison has though the prestige winning this award entails, brought attention to bear on the African-

American lives conceived in her writing. Her work, like that of the playwright August Wilson, is the journey of African-American life though a historical progression of dramatized events. For Morrison this means moving from a time before the expansion of the slave trade in her novel *Mercy* to the post-slavery dealt with in here novels *Jazz* and *Paradise* and on to the present time as conceived in her novel *God Help the Child*.

Her writings concern a whole race and the different times they have gone through as men, women, and children, their agony as African-American people living in a colonized country, working to transform themselves from slavery and the ensuing abjections towards an entirely new generation of black people, while at the same time paying great attention to black folklore and the traditions that also helped sustain their lives.

Therefore, her approach as an African-American writer is necessarily multifaceted, for she deals with different characters, situations and times. However, a good deal of her thematic attention revolves around understand cause and effect, a clear perspective of history, past, present, future, and what lies in between. This by necessity must include a careful, clear reading of the cultural, societal, and traditional aspects relating to the life of African-American people, who are in turn part of the greater project called the United States. As she proclaimed in an interview: “if you study the culture and art of African-Americans, you are not studying a regional or minor culture, what you are studying is America” (Morrison, 1993). This statement demands the African-American’s right to belong to the United States because the history of the African-American people is intertwined and deeply rooted in the country: They cannot be separated Conversely, her statement shows not only do African-American people belong to the greater project called the United States, but abjection can only be eliminated through owning the country which is theirs, of which African-American history, culture and literature is a component part of American history, culture, and literature. They complete each other and the whole is greater than the parts.

Besides presenting the culture and history of her people, what made Morrison write about the issues was her chance to break the barriers of neglect African-American writers suffer. She saw these barriers as divided into two camps: the ones who became bitter and extreme and the ones who were writing romantic work. Obliged to deliver the unforgettable truths that existed in the research she had done, Morrison felt both types of writers missed the target. “Then I thought. Wait a minute! They’re gonna skip over something, and no one is gonna remember that it wasn’t always beautiful, you know! No one is gonna remember how hurtful a certain kind of internecine racism is” (Morrison, 2008). Significantly, Morrison’s real concern and a major cause for her is to speak about what no one has spoken before. Morrison’s interest and devotion to her origins made her committed to the cause of African Americans, as she has declared through an interview in 2003. “I think that I will always write about African American people” (Morrison). Critical to her decision-making process was her desire to contribute to the contemporary critical issues of her people, the people she identified with, to tell their stories through a fictional work that shows a focused, larger than life portrait of their life and journey through slavery and after.

Therefore, her task as she defined it was to bring African American literature to African Americans and the greater American culture. Growing up she noticed in herself a desire to read books that contained an African American figure as a major character, a book that uses their words, their dialect, without the need to explain what the words mean; a real African-American book written for African-American people. This book was her first novel *The Bluest Eye*, which conveyed many of the critical aspects stated above. Notably, each novel of hers has not been created from an arbitrary imagination in an arbitrary way. After questioning and considering her methodology and how she would write what she needed to say, she decided on a fictional form. Rather than stating authorial opinion or placing her opinion in the mouths of her characters, she let them evolve as distinct, fictional personalities, leaving the decision making about who and what the characters were to the readers themselves (Morrison, 1993). At the same time, quite naturally, her texts are thematically dominated by the racial and societal issues that drove her literary quest; the life of subjugation African-American men, women, and children in her books had

to undergo through their as slaves, the demeaning and degrading life they so often encountered as the result of the objectification of their ancestors and their abjection by the greater culture.

Inevitably, the female character took a primary part in her writing. As an African American woman, Morrison worked hard to present the African American female figure in a "true" image through different life stages without beautifying the facts or evading them. Thus she illuminates how African American women experience abject through their family, loved ones, or their culture.

This study aims to present the journey of abjection women in her novels *Beloved* and *Paradise* from the first time they are racialized, objectified and abjected, from enslavement on through post-emancipation, where though at last able to form an emancipated, all-black society, they are still enslaved by the power of abjection that built on foundations of the plantation manor, leading African American society to discriminate against one another using the viewpoint espoused by the master. Through her novel *Beloved*, Morrison presents this circle of abjection that the black women were confined to, from the first generation arriving from African, who were subjected to rape, abuse, and torture, through the next generation the post emancipation period. Born in the United States, these women, like the characters Sethe, Halle, and baby Suggs her mother-in-law, are still confined in the same circle of abjection. So, it continues with Denver from the next generation born after slavery. She also suffers from the consequences of the slavery, the racism, and the abject life. Through Sethe and the major characters of *Beloved*, Morrison introduces the inception of the stereotypical image of the abject black female figure that stereotyped them and made them the repulsive other in both white and black society.

Morrison presents a new direction for the abjection of the African-American woman in her novel *Paradise*, where, light and dark-skinned African-American people are pitted against each other in a caste battle that creates a rivalry and feeds the repulsive attitude that grows up between them. Thus, regardless of the old abjection circle created by the relationship of the greater white society to African American society, another abjection circle comes to exist only among African

American. Morrison shows how this comes about through the town of Ruby and how the dark-skinned people there reject light-skinned people like Pat and her mother. Along with the question of caste, Morrison also addresses the question of class in Ruby where the founding fathers discriminate against any kind of outsiders moving in because they do not belong to the original families that created Ruby—in this respect their skin color doesn't matter. The different female characters in the novel are of course abjected. The women of Ruby, like Pat, Lone, and Anna Flood, make their peace with abjection, feeling compelled to follow the customs of the town, unlike the women of the Convent, who were presented as completely abject and are therefore a threat to the customs of Ruby.

This thesis is dedicated to the presentation of abjection theory and the African-American female figure's journey through abjection during slavery, and the appearance of all black and white communities after the post-emancipation period, where it will present the abjection of the African American female figure, as well as the status those women occupied during these periods. This thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is dedicated to presenting Julia Kristeva's Abjection theory. It discusses the abject figure and the inception of the abject black female figure through slavery and how that image remains incised in the stereotype, even after the post-emancipation period. The second chapter is dedicated to presenting the abject black female figure as seen in the text of the novel *Beloved* and its relationship to abjection, While the third chapter is dedicated to the post-Emancipation abjection of black women in both white and black societies through the novel *Paradise*. It discusses how women are abjected for their skin color and for being liberated and different. The fourth part of this thesis is dedicated to discussing the modern abjection of the black woman through the media, as well as the stereotypical image of the Jezebel figure in mainstream media through the millennial period to the present.

FIRST CHAPTER

1. Abjection: The State of Being Cast Off

Abjection is a theory that can be related to many aspects of life whether past or present and is considered one of the most significant theories in the postmodern literary domain. Created and explicated by Julia Kristeva, the Bulgarian and French philosopher in her book the *Power of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Kristeva created a new understanding of this word in literary theory and criticism.

Kristeva, considered one of the most brilliant contemporary philosophers, is a gadfly: literary critic, psychoanalyst, semiotician, feminist, and novelist. Her work has gained widespread acclaim, and she has won many awards, such as the Holberg International Memorial Prize and the Hannah Arendt Prize (Schippers, 2011). In constant demand as a speaker, she is an elder statesman for post-modernist theory.

Abjection in this context is used to describe or discuss multiple critical issues like "the social body, misogyny, homophobia, racism, anti-Semitism" (Schippers, 2011) and any number of kinds of oppression that lead to abjection Kristeva reveals the position of the in-between, where meaning collapses between the subject and object, a place people are repulsed by but has an existence beyond death. She also delves into various classifications, such as dislike and disgust, deriving from the core concept of the abject, which are significantly marked in their meaning by a lack of subjectivity and purity. Abjection's relation to society, culture, art, religion, to the family, really any place it might well occur—whether inflicted on the self and by the self. Her article on the abject present's different possible definitions and a discussion of the abject figure in the work of Freud, Aristotle, Dostoevsky, and Proust and others

Abject as used here means the state of being cast off, and the lack of subjectivity and definition. According to Kristeva, it is neither a subject nor an object and it "has only the singular quality of the object- that of being opposed to I" (Kristeva, 1982). This is how the abject gains its life force, stuck in between with its own being, where it does not follow the master's rules but at the same time does not challenge its master. It rejects interacting with normative, status quo social or cultural activities and is found everywhere and anywhere to anyone who does not know what they like or hate yet are alienated from anywhere they find themselves to be. "It lies there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated" (Kristeva, 1982). Abjection occurs when a person experiences a sense of loss because there are no social groups of which they feel they can be a part. Instead of asking who I am? or what do I love or want? the subject is occupied with judging people and their surroundings, which becomes a form of abjecting both these people and their environment, or it might turn on the subject and occur as self-abjection, which is a mean of proclaiming their identity.

Kristeva has defined abjection as what disturbs identity, system, or order because it breaks down or neglect all the previous categorizations. As she says, "The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good con-science, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior... Any crime because it draws attention to the frag-ility of the law, is abject" (Kristeva, 1982). Hence, it becomes defined by what does not respect boundaries, positions, or rules, because it is constructed from its own being, which is a threat to what is ordered and pure.

A certain amount of revulsion is created by an abject act, and consequently, abjection becomes "directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable." (Kristeva, 1982). Abjection is therefore accompanied by a sense of separation, aversion, and perversion. People separate themselves from this kind of vicious, corrupted, and impure kind of behavior/figure. The abject, which people reject, feel alienated from, and consider the opposite and the Other, creates a sense of revulsion against it.

Secondly, according to Kristeva, abjection might also occur as “self-abjection”, where a person is abject in and of themselves in order to form an identity that contains it, as when “someone fails to recognize its kin” (Kristeva, 1982). She presents this kind of abjection through the concept of food loathing, as when a child abhors the milk skin floating on hot milk. By rejecting the skin of the hot milk—and whatever the parents are presenting, whether clothes, toys and so on—the child is identifying its own preferences by differentiating itself from what its parents’ might offer. The child is abjecting itself and drawing the borders of its own identity through this process, so as to learn how to make different choices from its parents. The parents have become the subject, the milk is the object, and the child has become the abject, the Other, and therefore has proclaimed its own unique and different identity by choosing what it prefers and rejecting their choices. According to Kristeva this stage occurs before the creation of a symbolic order and it is the beginning of the formation of a child’s narcissist character—that she calls a “narcissistic crisis” — where the child starts to mold its identity, subjectivity, and space as an independent being. This narcissistic crisis will accompany it through a lifelong journey, even as a full-grown adult.

Thirdly, some people condemn other individuals through the use of abjection for being what they want to yet be somehow different from the normative standard of common identity. These people see them as the Other and in turn abject them, and this occur when an individual being abjected becomes concerned about people and their lives more than their own life. Through this concept Kristeva creates a deconstructive perspective in order to see society and the various behaviors and actions of people from a different perspective. She shows how people tend to define themselves through negation, “what they are not”, since “it situates the negative and derogatory presentation of the other” (Yanos, 2018). This direction leads to a fallacious precedent, that is judging people for being different. Abjection is the foundation of bullying and racism because it differentiates the self from the Other.

Kristeva offers a theoretical alternative to judgement through negation by way of her concept of “the me that is not me” (Kristeva, 1982). Within the yoke of normative judgement, people tend to identify themselves by rejecting the Other.

Through this altered perspective people create their liminal space and how they rank and fit in their society.

Though abjection has deleterious features, it is also a critical process for developing a personal subjectivity by enabling a person to individuate—to learn how they are different from others, to choose what they like or dislike and through this process identity is formed. Therefore, according to Kristeva, some people find their "fortified existence" (1982) in abjection; they able to find their place as a third party. A good example of this is if someone is gay. Before admitting they have a gender role that differentiates them from the normal, their position in society has no locus. But by embracing their difference they embrace abjection. By stating their position in society, they become fixed in the society. There are released from the punishment of ambiguity.

Which is of course a more acceptable choice for them. These kinds of people create agency for themselves. They are specifying their rank in society through abjection by way of being the Other, thus forming a unique identity as opposed to the conventions established by "normative" customs and habits related to negative othering. It is in this sense that Kristeva presents abjection as a mean to arrive at a different existence. She declares that "It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance." (Kristeva, 1982). In this manner abjection can be used to present the Other, but from a new perspective where death is not the end of life but is the start of something else, and where being the Other does not always mean being consigned to condemnation.

As mentioned before, the abject can be a way that people condemn and judge others and a way of proclaiming subjectivity. It is thus a complex deconstructive process that illustrates the various kinds of people in a society that are abject; those who commit a hideous crime or are abject for simply being different—for not following the social and cultural standards. They have proclaimed their subjectivity by abjecting Through these diverse interpretations of the term, a deep analysis of social structure may be fabricated which makes abjection an essential part of literary analysis and criticism, since it shows the different structures in a society and where

people occupy on the social ladder. Furthermore, abject's adaptation by post-colonial and feminists' critics has added another deconstructive perspective to their search for meaning that dives deep into the human psyche in the search for new possibilities and answers. In the same manner, the othering inherent in "Different" is familiar to both post-colonialism and feminism, since both have focused on what lies in-between lines, not to mention the unjust binaries that determine racial or gender discrimination.

One of the most critical concepts to post-colonialism criticism is Edward Said's the "Other" in his book *Orientalism* (1978), where he examines the different binaries created in the field of oriental studies, unveiling in the process their perspective of the Other as the opposite, impure, and chaotic. Another essential concept in post-colonial criticism is Gayatri Spivak's the "Subaltern", presented in her essay *Can The Subaltern Speak* (2010). This figure represents the silenced minorities considered inferior, ignorant, and submissive by the dominant class. Both also discuss the gaze of the white male figure and how they perceived the female Other. Said and Spivak have approached this gaze in an attempt to prevent a stereotypical understanding of it. The abject, the subaltern and the Other have become some of the most important concepts in post-colonialism study. Indeed, they play a crucial part in literary analysis and criticism.

On the other hand, the premise of "The Different" has been used in feminist literary theory and criticism as well; most feminists have grafted the post-colonial to it in the search to proclaim women's agency and subjectivity. Feminists who have used this premise are Helene Cixous, who through her theory *The Laugh of The Medusa* (2017), has proclaimed the power and danger of femininity through a monstrous figure that has been cursed, cast out and presented as the Other. Using the gaze of the gorgon's snake-entangled face, she advocates for women to be strong, proclaim their sexuality, and accept their state of being cast out, while at the same time using their otherness to build a strong, unique, and fearful character. The English novelists Angela Carter through her book *The Bloody Chamber and other stories* (1993), reconfigured the fairytale form to create a new perspective that proclaims her feminine sexuality, identity, and subjectivity. Her use of abjection in

The Bloody Chamber transformed the fairy tale genre beyond its traditional conventions and into the realm of pornographic gothic fantasy. She undermines the traditional structure of the genre by focusing the climax of the tale on the abject instead of a reconciliation (Pentony, 1996).

Proclaiming identity through being different—adopting the abject, the monstrous figure, the Other, etc. —was first adopted by novelists, feminist critics and philosophers in Gothic literature. During the second wave of feminism during the 1960s, feminists choose to draw attention to the female figure and provide her with agency and strength in order to reverse the weak submissive stereotypical image. Thus "feminism was 'perhaps the most obvious force at work' transforming 'a field that was once neglected at best and at worst a bastion of bibliophilic cranks' into 'a very important area of study'" (Wallace & Smith, 2009).

One of the most significant feminists' writers who have used Kristeva's abjection theory in this sense is Barbara Creed. Her book *The Monstrous-Feminine* adopts both abjection and Gothic elements, as well as other critical theories to discuss the monster female figure in horror movies—where women are presented as the weak stereotypical victims and framed as the villain. She argues this image is developed through the thought development of the child who used to be fearful of its mother because of the castration complex, which made him afraid of her, and thus create her personae as a monster. In his adult life the monster become a stereotype. Creed's theory is the killing of the male figure by the villainous female figure is her way of proclaiming women's dominance (1993). This theory fits snugly into the premise that Kristeva has created of "the fortified existence", which makes abjection an empowering position that helps in forming identity and choosing one's place and existence in society—and is especially true for the abjected figures.

Accordingly, African American women are considered crucial models of this theory, for they have been abjected and racialized for quite a time. They have suffered from abjection their beginning s in slavery to the present, where their position as black women have been confined in a circle of abjection: "the me that is

not me". These women have been suffering this form of stereotyping, which has led to traumatic consequences for them on the short and long term.

1.1 The Making of The Abject Black Female Figure

African American women, beyond a shadow of a doubt, have experienced violations of their bodies and rights by the white patriarchal male figure through the colonial and the post-colonial periods. This status has reached its peak during slavery, "an institution that caught black women in a web of tangled exploitation" (Ellison, 2008) where these women lost their rights to control their bodies and lives. This state of abjection they suffer at the hands of white society has led to the violation of the black female figure.

Because of the slave trade, African women became an object transformed from one country to the other and then possessed by different owners. They were wrenched from their families, tribes, native environments, and kingdoms. Their journeys from their place of birth, were filled with violation and many of them died. Those who lived, continued to do so in trauma and fear.

Through the ensuing years of slavery, African American women were often forced to submit to forms of oppression that violated their bodies and rights as human beings, causing various consequences for them physically, mentally and emotionally. These women suffered rape and were tortured for many reasons. They were objectified, abjected, and humiliated. Moreover, by depriving them of dignity, agency, and respect, slave-owners managed to create and maintain them as the inferior slave subject (Cooper, 2015), which kept them under control and tamed them as one would a domestic pet. To a large extent, African women had only two roles through that period; either they became housekeepers or workers in the field, and in both cases, they were forced to fulfill the task of sexual entertainment for their owners. According to Davis:

> The purity of white womanhood could not be violated by the aggressive sexual activity desired by the white male. His instinctual urges would find expression in his relationships with his property- the black slave woman, who would have to become his unwilling concubine. (Davis, 1971)

Used as a mean for sexual satisfaction or as a slave reproducer, masters, slaves from the same plantations, or men "on loan" from outside the plantation forced the female slave to conceive children. These then could be sold so the owner could make a profit from his property.

All that has been previously discussed occurred as consequences of the abjecting of African American women that occurred with the start of colonialism. Black meant the other and the abject, but this happened mostly because women were place at the bottom of a hegemonic diagram, and African American women were even farther below. Accordingly, the first journey of abjecting the black woman experienced was through being sold as objects and thus turned into the "abjected object" (Soubieski, 2018). The moment they were sold and put on ships to America, black women became property, which started them on the journey to being exploited. By making the African American woman a commodity, the dominant white figure decided the destiny of the black female figure, as well as the way she will be used or consumed "as a commodity". Consequently, through the process of commodification, black women have been objectified twice: first as a commodity and second as a sexualized object.

Commodification became the major reason for the existence of the sexualized object. The creation of this form of objectification led to many other violations of the African-American women's body and rights. According to Cooper, "The rhetoric of commodification was later apparent in how women's bodies were further disciplined during slavery, through the abuse of their masters" (2015). Torture, rape, and other forms of violence, as a result of their commodification as a sexual object and as property, scarred their bodies through abuse, mistreatment and objectification.

This commodification process led to yet another form of oppression for the female figure; one could say she is black diamond taken from the field. As motioned in passing before, to feed the slave trade, infants/children were taken from their

mothers and sold. This in turn led to myths about the "unfeeling qualities of female slaves, that it was permissible to sell their children because it was believed they don't feel pain through childbirth: so they can give birth and go back to work in the field the next day (Hatfield, 2005). This illustrates how the African female body was viewed as a mere machine for slave production. Of course, using them in these ways was justified by the owners because to them, black women were never considered anything but an abjected object.

Using their bodies to expand the slave population became a major excuse and concept for the owners to permit the exploitation of black women. All these elements, the consequence of the previous forms of the white hegemonic processes—commodification, objectification, and the expansion of the slave trade—made the process of abjecting and therefore sexualizing the black woman even stronger. The effect of all this created a new, dehumanizing dimension for black women as they were exploited, a stereotypical, fixed image that haunted the black female figure even after slavery, confining the black women to a circle of abjection even to the present day.

The process of abjection truly started "When Europeans enslaved Africans, blackness came to mean not only easy sexuality but laziness, bestiality, savagery, and violence, all of which had to be countered" (Nash, 2009). Blackness came to mean a wild and dehumanized existence, causing the dehumanization of African women. The black female figure, stripped of her humanity, became a wild fantasy, the abject figure that "beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire" (Kristeva, 1982). There were exceptions to this rule. Some white owners fell in love with their slave, had kids and kept them. Such was the case with Thomas Jefferson and Sarah Hemmings. Some were even educated or freed but they were few, while the vast majority were used to fulfill the fantasy of having wild sexual intercourse "as they believed", with no obligations toward the abject object.

This hegemonic categorization has been a catastrophic for the black female figure because "The racial-sexual myths that enabled slavery have been transformed in various historical periods but have secured in the idea that black women's

sexuality is deviant, dangerous, and pathological." (Nash, 2009). This issue has forced the African American female figure, the face of this myth, to suffer wholesale exploitation reaching into coming generations, stripping power and control of sexuality from the black female figure. As Hooks has stated in this regard: "The body taken over, stripped of its agency and made to serve the will, desire, and needs of other." (Shohat, 1998). Thus, the African American Female body became a target only for pleasure. They found themselves obliged to confront the lustful needs and fantasies of their owners, who have placed them in a vicious circle of exploitation. Deprived of their subjectivity and identity, these black women were forced to become a means of sexual entertainment. By sexualizing these women to the exclusion of humanizing factors, the white overseer maintained the constructed image of the inferiority of the black figure because of its impurities, and it is this very construct that drove her into the arms of the abject.

This dehumanization of the African-American woman must be added to the list of abjections as they were also forced to plot in order to gain the often-arbitrary favor of the master and the mistress they were working for to protect themselves. Otherwise, they will be beaten, whipped, or experienced other forms of torture. A case in point is the following double bind. If they agreed to being sexually exploited by a male owner, they might end up tortured or beaten by the mistress for her husband's infidelity as "the mistress of the plantation, wives held a degree of power that could either improve the lives of slaves on her plantation or create further harm and devastating destruction." (Cooper, 2015). On the other hand, if they refused to have sexual intercourse with the plantation master, they would either be tortured until they accepted this form of rape, or they would end up being sold to another owner at some other plantation, something potentially as traumatic if not more so as it could involve separation for family, children or even a sexual and emotional partner.

From the slave owner's viewpoint this resulted in a stereotypical image where "Black female bodies were almost always framed within a context of a patriarchal, pornographic, racialized sexualization. They are de-aestheticized and de-eroticized." (Shohat, 1998), forced to embody the sign of sexual ruin. Hence, being sexualized

and dehumanized became a major element in black women's lives, a stereotypical image created to cause suffering.

In effect, that destructive image and all the objectification and the dehumanization they experienced were the results of the position they occupied in that society, for since the beginning they have been considered wicked in comparison with the white female figure. Their value was determined to be that of a repellent object placed in juxtaposition to the white woman's great value: "the pure vs the impure" or "the subject vs the abject". According to Cooper, such a distinction was created in relation to religion, where a white woman's was exalted. Their character was established on the basis of spurious "integral and moral grounds", while the black woman's value had nothing to do with ethics because it was proven through the external, economic forces of the market. An Inverse relationship is thus established where a white woman's purity could be maintained by simultaneously sustaining the myth of a black woman's impurity (2015). Therefore, the enslaved black female figure had no chance to gain the agency it needed vis å vis the typical owner because they were identified as repellent and corrupted and purchase as a commodity.

As opposed to the white female figure. Such categorization has created the stereotype of the black women as the repellent abject but a desirable one, the one the white master figure ejaculates on or in to maintain the sanctity and purity of the white woman. Through such a process, African American women became the abject that is the bearer of everything that stands in opposition to that which is pure and white. They are a representation of what is perverted to the white society.

Through this journey of slavery, black women have been abjected for different reasons and purposes, a process that started when they became racialized. By making them the other, the white owners abjectified them and severely corroded their rights as human beings. By commodifying, objectifying, and sexualizing African-American women, the white powers that be deprived them of their subjectivity and identity. This causes meaning to collapse; their only relation to the object is what Kristeva has presented "as opposed to I" (1982). It is this comparison between black and white

that confined African American women to a circle of abjection. By abjecting them through the concept “the me that is not me”, black women became a sign of the opposite, the other, the subaltern, and of course the abject. All these tyrannical signs led to their violation and oppression. Abjecting in this manner was another way of claiming subjectivity for the white figure seeking to maintain its purity at the expense of the black figure by differentiating itself from the corrupted black other, and thus creating the premises of the stereotypical image of the abject African American female figure.

1.2 Post-Emancipation Continuous Abjection

African American women faced many obstacles during the post-emancipation period for they arrived as former slave figures and therefore carried the burdens of abjection. At this time, most of the African American women joined the workforce to support their families. Although many sought to be housewives, “Unfortunately, the opportunity for black women to remain at home was often short-lived” because “The dire poverty of most black families made it necessary for fathers and mothers to both contribute to the family income” (Tolman, 2011).

Most black women either worked in people’s houses as servants, on plantations picking crops, or in urban areas as blue-collar worker at factories on a salary that allowed them nothing more than the basics they needed to survive. Moreover, black single mothers through that period could not get financial support from the government as they still were considered as the abject, “the other”. According to Frankel:

> The granting of pensions to formerly enslaved women were tricky because slave marriages were not governed by a contractual agreement as were civil marriages and were not considered legal. Originally, pension law only recognized legal marriages and ignored slave marriages. Slaves did not possess legal documentation, like a marriage certificate, for use as evidence in a widow's pension claim. (1997)

Forced to live through the hard times of former slaves rather than a life as emancipated freedmen, most black women were either working wives, single mothers, or widows carrying all the responsibilities of family. The stereotypical, oppressive images with which they were viewed kept these women within the regime of the abjected.

The post-emancipation period for black women was therefore, more or less, a continuation of the same burdened life they have lived as slaves. These African-American women abjected twice; first through the institution of slavery and secondly as former slaves, which, in turn, is mostly based on the first form of abjection. In turn, growing organically from the history of their abjection, the black female figure continued to be a symbol of lust and erotica after the abolition of slavery, the same abjection which oppressed their ancestors and haunted them into the next generation and beyond. The African American female figure, ruined by the shackles of abjectness, was placed beyond redemption: "It is no wonder, then, that when slavery ended black females usually chose to follow the path of either obsessive representations of themselves as virtuous and therefore worthy of respect, or wantonly represented themselves as loose and licentious." (Shohat, 1998). The impact of the reality of abjection resulted in the commodification of their sexuality, a state first experienced in slavery. Many chose to keep their virtue and conform rigidly to conditions such as celibacy (which, of course, they did not have the right to protect or maintain during slavery), while others chose to be free concerning the way they expressed themselves and bodies. Either way, through this period, black women had to live through devastating poverty which had a major effect on their choices and thus added more burdens.

The abject position African-American women found themselves in after the abolition of slavery drove many of these women to work in prostitution, having few options economically and at the same time being willing to liberate themselves from the rigid sexual mores of much of the populations. Those who chose to maintain their "virtue" often suffered from incidents where their employer took advantage of their financial situation to exploit them sexually. Such incidents were very common at that time for African American women, especially sexual harassment and rape, quite

common during that period by both white and black men. In sum, black women wandered in a vicious circle of sexual victimization after emancipation and reconstruction because, according to White, white men used to believe that raping black women is not a crime as the law did not consider it as a crime. This indicates how few legal rights black women had. On the other hand, if they reported a rape incident by black man, the man would be hanged since at that time the death penalty was given for all kinds of crimes. Even for stealing (White, 1999). What is critical to understand is rape was not considered a crime when it came to black women, an issue that they could only deal with by saying nothing because they had no legal recourse.

This, according to Broussard, was the silence syndrome that black women suffered from through and after slavery. She argues that the silence that black women had to experience had three parts: “1) silence of Black women stemming from the vestiges of slavery and their societal status; (2) the silence of a legal system that has ignored them; and (3) the silence implicit in the failure of today's society to fully tell her story.” (2013). By way of these hegemonic tools, silence was imposed on the black abjected female figure. Therefore, black women became the abject figure, stuck in between, “neither a subject nor an object”, deprived of their rights as human beings by white patriarchal figures who oppressed their subjectivity and identity, which led in turn to the violation of their rights as human beings. This happened because violating African American women was the normalized value of that society, as Broussard explains: “In the first instance, if Black women were not human, then they could not be violated; in the second instance, they did not deserve protection because ‘they asked for it,’ and were promiscuous and immoral.” (2013). Black women were considered less than human, sensualist figures that “asked for it”, who willingly wanting to be raped under the pretext of the rape myth. In turn, the justifications of the violations that were being done towards the black female figure were like a prison enclosure that restricted them to an enclosure of exploitation.

As one can imagine, the consequences for the African American female, mentally and physically, during the post-emancipation period were traumatic. They suffered a variety of maladies from stress, such as heart attacks and other related

diseases. Stress became the halo that surrounded their lives, “a hidden killer underlying all the major health problems black women face” (Hooks, 2014). Along with the physical and mental consequences of slavery, which left them financially and emotionally insecure, their life as free people included having to live with stereotypical images and abjection. Though technically free, they faced a constant fear they and their families might be drawn back to slavery, killed by hostile white people, or die from poverty and its effects such as malnutrition. As Hooks took note, black women’s lives were far from peaceful (2014). They were working women who had to face their limited post-slavery opportunities, which restricted them to housewife, worker, servant, or a prostitute. This life in which they carried the stress of oppression in their limited opportunities became a major part of their lives. The diseases and physical maladies that followed were “The body’s response to carrying more than it can bear” (Hooks, 2014). If they were “considered strong” by family, friends or employers, they were not strong by choice but because they had to be to get over the cruel regime of slavery they witnessed, to survive to see the day of their freedom from the stereotypes imposed on them, and to have a family of their own free from their painful history, a place where they can live their lives as human beings who have power and control over their bodies.

From the beginning of slavery “most black women were not content to accept that they were forever trapped as pawns in a trading game” (Ellison, 2008). As a result of being abjected for some time, African American women were able to create a space of their own by maintaining a position in good standing with the religious and the social side of their lives. For regardless of the shattered relationships black women had their own unique relationship -the feminine bond- that strengthened each other with its solidarity. According to Frankel, “Women's ties with other women became more significant during specific female gender-related experiences, such as childbirth. Among women, midwives possessed a special status since they aided women during the life-threatening as well as the life-giving experience of childbirth.” (1997). This kind of relationship helped black women to build their unique form of communion inside the community that was restricted only to black women who helped each other with this unique bonding that bound together identity and subjectivity, creating bond against the repulsive nature of abjection being

directed towards them. Through the relationships established in this process, black women created a "liminal space" that enabled them to embrace their abjection as a way of proclaiming an identity, which became what Kristeva has called “the fortified existence”. African American women used the fortified existence to build and strengthen their position in the society and create a community for women from the post-emancipation period to the present.

1.3 Modern Abjection

It is generally accepted in feminist theory that “From the early 1630s to the present, black American women of all shades have been portrayed as hypersexual "bad-black-girls” (Pilgrim, 2012), which is part of the stereotypical image created as a consequence of the abjection of the black female figure. As previously discussed, this image of being the bad black girl has continued to evolve until it has become a fixed characteristic for black women. Moreover, this image is a consequence of the black female figure being objectified and confined to the gaze which focuses on its stereotypes and biases more than the equivalent gaze would on the white female figure. According to Anderson et al., “Recent research suggests that Black women have experienced higher levels of objectification than other ethnic groups”. He goes on to mention that “the sexualization of Black women may contribute to their objectification by others” (2018) which creates a direct relationship between both, for objectification has created in its turn the sexualization of the black female figure.

Consequently, both “objectification and sexualization” have affixed a certain hypersexual image on black women called the “Jezebel” image: “it became increasingly easy to find black women, especially young ones, depicted as Jezebels whose only value is as sexual commodities” (Pilgrim, 2012). Through this period black women were often divided into two groups: those who are either righteous or corrupted. The jezebel image—quite naturally one considered corrupted—was a stereotype constructed as a completely sexualized character concerning the way it

looks and the way society views it. This word has been particularly used for describing black women. “The name Jezebel came to signify a deceitful and immoral woman” (Pilgrim, 2012), a decadent, objectified and sexualized black female figure from the post-emancipation period to the 21st century.

This image has come to occupy a huge space in the imagination of contemporary popular culture through movies, television, and related media like Hip-Hop videos. The same stereotype of the sexualized, objectified black female figure dating back to slavery persists in the way black women are presented in mainstream media, where “In the videos, black women are represented as interchangeable bodies instead of active roles. This means that a black woman in the videos can be replaced by another black body, if need be.” (Avery, 2017), and all done to create and maintain the perfect Jezebel image. Furthermore, according to Anderson et al., this is particularly true for the sexualized, objectified black female figure, for “Recent research suggests that Black women are hypersexualized to a greater degree in the media than are White women.” (Anderson et al, 2018), showing “an alluring and seductive African American woman who is highly sexualized and valued purely for her sexuality” (Anderson et al, 2018).

The first step to the creation of the jezebel image begun with racially stereotyping the black female figure and then sexualizing it. By making them erotically different than a white female, the process of creating the sexually abject figure is justified by the process of racializing, objectifying, and sexualizing them. By considering her as the erotic, sexual other “me that is not me” —a form of arousal for participants in the white patriarchal, hegemonic system—the sexual myths from the slavery period onward are perpetrated for the erotic satisfaction by the systemic overseers.

This brutal vision is maintained through the gaze, which can only focus on the common stereotypical representation of African American women, which in turn becomes a major issue for their perception of themselves. This patriarchal sexual gaze has had a huge impact on the self-worth the black female figure. According to Avery, it is through the manipulative patriarchal media that black women receive

their value. He argues that “Media, such as hip-hop, celebrates a masculinist, commodified field of cultural production that is particularly important for black women's views of themselves” (2017). Through the media normalizing this gaze, black women become used to it and in turn play the part of the Jezebel willingly. “By insisting on self-definition, black women question not only what has been said about African American women, but the credibility and the intentions of those possessing the power to define” (Avery, 2017). For black women to become so completely sexualized and commodified shows to what extent this value has been controlled by patriarchal male figures, whether they be a white male overseer or a black male hip-hop producer. As a result of losing the power to identify their value, black women have so often lacked the power to draw the lines of their true value by themselves. This loss of power confined black women to a circle of abjection.

In conclusion, starting from slavery, the abjection of African-American women continued to persist on the streets and in the media. The journey of the black female figure through abjection, being commodified and stereotyped on their racialized journey, has had its fair share of oppression, violation, and bullying for quite some time.

One of the most significant African American writers to have addressed these issues is Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison. Her books have discussed and addressed the history of African Americans from the first colonization of the Americas before slavery was institutionalized, through the establishment of slavery in South America and on to the present day. She reveals the issues that have taken place in the lives of Black people, and especially women, for she illustrates the different life stages and position of the black female figure, along with the obstacles and the violation that have taken a place in their lives, from the origins of slavery to the present. The coming chapters are dedicated to how she presents the abject female figure through the novel *Beloved*, and her novel *Paradi*se. In each one of them she has presented the abjection which black women experienced, as slaves in *Beloved*, and former slaves in *Paradise*.

SECOND CHAPTER

2. The Journey of Abjection

Without a doubt, African American women have walked a long, circuitous road to get to where they are today. The journey has been filled with oppression of various sorts and being stereotyped as the bad other. During slavery they were surrounded by a state of abjection, and as discussed in the first chapter, they were racialized, sexualized, objectified, and abjected. This chapter is therefore dedicated to discussing the journey of abjection that black women have gone through as seen in the novel Beloved by Toni Morrison.

Morrison's dedication to her research and her style of addressing these issues have made Beloved one of the most significant books in any serious discussion about slavery and its effects on African American people, in general and women in specific. She brings the harsh, direct light of history on how African American women, in numerous disturbing ways, have been abjected and in turn violated.

This chapter will discuss and reveal the invention of the abject black female figure in *Beloved*, as well as the effect that abjection has on them; how the women in this novel managed to survive and sometimes flourish despite suffering sexual assault and the burden of their stereotypes, images that are an essential consequence of oppression and trauma. By analyzing the novel's main characters, this chapter will reveal how abjection is rooted in the greater American society, and how its consequences for African American women are the result of various forms of oppression to ensure abjection and the celebration of stereotypical images.

2.1 The Abject Black Female Figure

Beloved is a fictional supernatural story based on a real incident that Morrison felt the need to adapt to the fictional form. This provided her with an opportunity to revise the story so the world could bear witness to the historical trauma African American people went through. Accordingly, she sees the novel as the history of their ancestors. As she has stated: “It’s not a black father, it’s yours. You know the one you know? That one” (Morrison, 2008). Through *Beloved*, Morrison reveals the cruel regime of slavery as well as the abjection that the African race has experienced in America.

The novel starts its narration in house 124, where Sethe the former slave, as well as her daughter Denver, are living alone after the death of grandmother Baby Suggs. Buglar and Howard, her sons, have run away from 124 because the house is haunted. From its beginning the novel has a multi-perspective narration that shifts from one character to the other, between the present and the past, or one may say that the past is roaming and haunting every character in the novel without giving them time to breath. The novel presents different people with different stories, for each one of the characters had his\her fair share of being oppressed, violated, and abjected. *Beloved* also presents the lives of the slaves who used to live on a farm called Sweet Home. Mr. And Mrs. Garner, the owners of Sweet Home, are important but minor characters as the focus of the tale is on Beloved, Sethe and her family. Though Sethe is considered as one of the major characters, she herself used to live at Sweet Home with her husband Halle, her children, Halle’s mother Baby Suggs, as well as a number of other slaves. Though one is referred to as Sixo, most of them called Paul; Paul D, Paul A, Paul F and so forth.

Beloved presents numerous physical and emotional violations through the narration of the different characters. These violations are not secreted in the subtext but are woven and locked into the thrust of the theme and the plot so they may easily be read and understood by the readers, though by digging deeper into what is being

said between the lines, a truer understanding of the actual status women occupied in that period may be understood. Morrison paves a thematic path by introducing different characters who have been violated in different ways throughout their lives; tortured, sexualized, or objectified through various generations, from the time they came from their African homeland like Sethe's mother, to the new generation like Denver, who was born in America. Thus, Morrison has presented different female characters abjected by different practices, starting from Sethe's mother, who represents the African colonized women, Sethe who represents a historical figure from the original non-fiction story who killed her daughter, and Beloved, who represent the ghost of her dead baby and all the angry souls of black people. While other characters represent different sorts of women suffering from different sorts of violations, much like Baby Suggs, it is Denver who represents the new generation, though they too suffered with their parents for being former slaves and from poverty as well.

The foundation of *Beloved* is based on the story of an emancipated slave and former convict who killed her baby. But for Morrison, it was more. From this historical figure Morrison created Sethe, and always brings to the story of the slave in slavery to the foreground, the kinds of physical and psychological violations they suffered—the result of being abjected, conditions which are offered to answer this question: What led the figure in this slave narrative to kill her baby. Without judging or condemning, Morrison has said, "So, if I'm gonna imagine what it takes, to kill your baby, then, I have to put in my arms my baby" (Morrison, 2008). The decision to kill must be confronted by the mother of the baby with the baby in hand. One major theme in this novel is therefore about a woman who preferred to kill her child instead of bringing her into a world dominated by the misery of slavery, specifically African-American women who have these experiences as a consequence of their abjection.

This journey of abjection starts with the first generation that comes from Africa and is represented by Sethe's mother. It begins as a commodity called slavery, is sold and poured into ships for the Middle Passage to America, then sold again in the United States, forced to toil in the fields or in the big house, and at the same time is

often sexually exploited by their owners as rape and abuse became a part of the abject life. “Many colonists expressed disdain for Native women and enacted their contempt through using rape as a tool of conquest” (May, 2018). Being sexually assaulted, they in turn had children by the men who raped them. In contrast, a friend of Sethe’s mother notes that she refuses to be objectified and violated, and did this by only keeping Sethe because she loved the man who helped create her:

> She threw them all away but you. The one from the crew she threw away on the island. The others from more whites she also threw away. Without names, she threw them. You she gave the name of the black man. She put her arms around him. The others she did not put her arms around. (Morrison, 1987)

Through abandoning the children of non-consensual sex and keeping only the one that was the result of her choice, Sethe declared her refusal to accept the degradation of the violations she has suffered. She joins the sisterhood of those that feel that they are still in charge of making their own decisions regardless of the violations of body and mind. Historically, they are the first to deny and defy the oppressive system of slavery. Their reward is, like Sethe’s mother, to be killed for their resistance.

The equation is therefore simple: fight the abjection of slavery and die or submit to the constraints of slavery and live. The end result is the fracturing of the bonds between mother and child. Historically, African American women became unable to breastfeed their children, much less see them. Many like Sethe did not even know their moms.

> I did not see her but a few times out in the fields and once when she was working indigo. By the time I woke up in the morning, she was in line. If the moon was bright, they worked by its light. Sunday, she slept like a stick. She must of nursed me two or three weeks- that's the way the others did. Then she went back in rice and I sucked from another woman whose job it was. (Morrison, 1987)

This shows how their position in life was designed for the particular role chosen by their owners. They have become the repulsive abject “that is not a subject nor an object”, a commodity that can be sold, sexually taken advantage of, and used profitably as labor. Moreover, it shows how African-Americans have been racialized by a certain gaze that judges them as less than human, which in turn creates the abject black figure from the terrible consequences of this gaze. In contrast, the next

generation came to be more submissive to the regime of slavery, brought up as they were to be submissive. Unlike their parents, they never knew freedom. They became more accustomed to abjection and the racialized gaze they receive from the white patriarchal society.

Sethe was from this second generation. Having spent her entire life in slavery in the United States, she faced physical and psychological violations, not to mention the numerous troubled times she found herself at a loss; lost and with no hope for the future. In the novel she is presented as an ordinary slave girl who was sold to Mr. Garner when she was just a child. She's a hard worker and obedient and all she says is "yes ma'am". This is a particular touchpoint in the narrative as this occurs even though her owners were good to her and the other slaves they owned. This in itself allowed her the opportunity to grasp hold of a wider vista as did the fact she was never raped. Therefore, she escaped being sexually traumatized. And still she longed for more—yearning for a wedding, and a feast and a white wedding dress to go with it—just like the slave owner's daughter had. But since she is a slave, all she had to make her wedding dress from was a burnt pillowcase and mosquito netting. Of course, the making of the dress was a clandestine activity as women were denied the right to get married, have weddings, or raise their children. Like Sethe, these enslaved women were allowed no life for themselves: All they were or made, even the children, were part of denial; they were denied the rights and freedoms reserved for white people. The white patriarchal society is depriving them of the right to marry, to carry the dream of physical and emotional love, an abjecting that considers them anything but "normal"; people with the right to love whom they want, raise their children by themselves, and to live within the family circle they have created. But Sethe, whether consciously or unconsciously, carries the seed of abjection. This will erupt in its full flowering when she kills her daughter at the end of the novel.

Morrison uses Sethe to represent the stubborn woman who attempted to acquired, to grab the social legitimacy she saw "white people" achieve: a wedding, a family, and a life as much her own as anyone's, and if and when she gave up the freedom of her life, it would be to people she chose, such as her husband or children. Eventually, because of the arbitrary nature of slavery, her good fortune to have had a

decent life comes to an end with the death of the plantation's owner Mr. Garner. Almost immediately afterwards she began to suffer being objectified and studied by the person/people who take charge of the plantation, the Schoolteacher and his nephews (Morrison, 1987). Through these examples, Morrison shows how African-American women became a subject to be studied—aside from being abjected and considered as objects. These white people observe the way they talk, eat as if they were laboratory animals. Sethe suffers from the inherent abjection of rape when she was nursed by the two nephews of the Schoolteacher. When she tells about the abuse, she is whipped (Morrison, 1987).

She provides milk for the Schoolteacher's nephews as if she is a milking cow, and she is tortured and whipped for telling them this is a form of abuse. Out of this comes the cruel image of a black woman who is pregnant and being sexually abused and tortured. This is Morrison's representation of how black women were discriminated against and considered sexual entertainment for the white male figure.

As a result of the humiliation and the hurt Sethe experiences, she chooses to run away from the Gardner Plantation, Sweet Home. By leaving the one place she's lived her entire life to face live alone and the miles and miles of walking barefoot, the bleeding of her back from a whipping and her birthing in the middle of nowhere, Sethe becomes the solitary existential figure. This leads her to kill her baby, which is part of the process of reclaiming her/self, thus allowing her to become a former slave and an ex-convict as well. Sethe is an archetype of the trials and tribulations of African-American slaves who went through slavery and paid the heavy price it demanded as they entered the period of emancipation.

Undoubtedly, Morrison introduces the caring mother, the one who was blamed because her love was "too thick" for her children (Morrison, 1987), as slaves were not supposed to love or be attached to their children. That critical issue was a real issue in slaves' lives, for they were forced to abandon their lives, children, dignity, and self-respect. They were dehumanized, abjected and deprived of every human right. This is why Sethe felt such guilt, because she loved her kids and became more attached to them than she was supposed to. She believed that "Thin love ain't love at

all" (Morrison, 1987). Admittedly, being abjected and violated did not break her as much as the disappearance of her two boys and the death of her little girl. Their loss broke her soul on the wheel, especially the death of her baby girl. She also wanted to die so that she could lay next to her baby girl (Morrison, 1987).

She lived long enough to forget what happened at Sweet Home, but when they came for her, she remembered everything—all the pain, manipulation, abjection, objectification, the sexual assault, and the abuse she witnessed. She immediately decided that neither she nor her children were going back to Sweet Home. Sethe says, "it ain't my job to know what's worse. It's my job to know what is and to keep them away from what I know is terrible. I did that" (Morrison, 1987). She understands when a person not only becomes free but understands freedom. Then there is no way for them to go back to being controlled and suffocated by the old regime of submission. When they came to capture her, she recalled all the terrible experiences. Thinking death is better than slavery for her and her children, she killed her baby girl.

After killing her daughter, Sethe becomes shunned, abjected by both the black and the white society. Her violent deed disturbs the social status quo of both worlds, defied the societal and cultural norms, for "In crossing the boundary, the abject highlights the significance of its function, but also simultaneously draws attention to its fragility" (Arya, 2014). Sethe's position in her society is fragile because she has become what people differentiate themselves from, what they feel alienated from. Rejected socially, Sethe was forced to live in a state of abjection and complete isolation from the world that has judged her.

Baby Suggs is also one of the major black female characters that Morrison has drawn question marks around. She is from the older generation that has changed hands from one owner to the next until she finally gains her freedom. She is presented as the archetype of the African-American woman who has lived a long life, gone through a lot, helped many people, and died lonely longing for "a taste for life". Moreover, "the character of Baby Suggs, provides an imaginative characterization of an experience of abjection that has these subversive powers" (Speight, 2017). These

powers reveal the troubles that she went through and how she responded to them. Hers is the true voice of the tradition of slave narratives. Though she is Sethe's mother-in-law, she is more than this to her and to many other black people who have escaped from the South. Her voice is their history and many critical aspects are presented through her character. Baby Suggs suffered a good deal more than Sethe, but she only discusses the struggles she has faced with Sethe when the subject of her children comes up.

And though she rarely mentions her past, one can read between the lines of her speech, fill in the blanks with what is suggested, and understand what she went through, though her journey was very similar and at times the same as any other African-American woman at that time. Sethe only had a taste, an inkling of what Baby Suggs journey was like.

For Baby Suggs has a journey all her own. She mentioned being discriminated against by others and being abjected by both white and black people for having eight children from both white and black men (Morrison, 1987). This is a hidden indication of her being sexually taken advantaged of at the same time that she is condemned by the gaze of these men. In fact, nobody knew if she was coerced or raped by white or black men since both acts are essential facts of the trials of slavery. Nobody imagined she might have been experiencing violations and objectification at the same time, that she might have been experiencing a variety of sexual assaults, and these children were the result of these acts. Hence, by keeping Baby Suggs life's details hidden, Morrison allows the reader the freedom to imagine and interpret what might have happened.

The results of their actions are obvious, which shows the second critical dimension of her situation: either she has been raped by white and black men for their pleasure as they longed for erotic sexual intercourse with black slave women, or she has been used sexually for demographic reasons as part of the machine to expand the labor market: she is either fetishized as an object of desire or commodified as a reproductive machine creating human life to become the property of slave owners. Either way she was not allowed to keep her children according to Sethe…

> She did not know to this day what their permanent teeth looked like; or how they held their heads when they walked. Did Patty lose her lisp? What color Famous' skin finally take? Was that a cleft in Johnny's chin or just a dimple that would disappear soon's his jawbone changed? Four girls, and the last time she saw them there was no hair under their arms. Does Ardelia still love the burned bottom of bread? All seven were gone or dead. What would be the point of looking too hard at that youngest one? But for some reason they let her keep him. He was with her - everywhere. (Morrison, 1987)

In fact, Sethe yearns to keep her children, but she is left with only Halle. Baby Suggs of course has never seen her kids grow up, nor does she know much about them, which is why she considers having a child grow up into adulthood as some sort of luxury.

> You lucky. You got three left. Three pulling at your skirts and just one raising hell from the other side. Be thankful, why don't you? I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased, and all, I expect, worrying somebody's house into evil… My firstborn. All I can remember of her is how she loved the burned bottom of bread. Can you beat that? Eight children and that's all I remember. (Morrison, 1987)

Through this quote Morrison draws attention to the lost rights of being a mother. Enslaved black women were denied the right to keep or even protect a child of their own. They were taken from her like a sheep taken from its mother to be sold. The mothers say nothing about their loss because they have no right to keep their master's property.

Baby Suggs lived with the loss of her children and the anger and sorrow of her husband who eloped and left her all alone. After buying her freedom, she tried to become a whole new person, a whole person that escapes being abjected and violated by white society and cherishes life and the freedom that has been given to her. Emancipated, she is finally free to care. She becomes concerned with encouraging people to love themselves, to be strong, and to cherish their lives and just simply live. She knew it's not a battle she can win for "She, in the middle of her life, is a survivor of degradation and defeat, but her method of survival is not necessarily "to overcome" (Speight, 2017). She believes that former slaves, instead of fighting, should start living, and the act of living, free in the moment, is itself a triumph over oppression (as well as being a statement about their position in that society at that

time). Morrison wanted to convey that they had already lost, so accepting this loss means accepting defeat and the state of abjection, and thus making it a powerful position from where they could find a “fortified existence”. This way they would not have to spend their life denying what has been forced on them.

By reconciling with her past, Baby Suggs helps other people recover from the travails of the white dominated society. The feasts she created as a means to enjoy life and freedom with the black community of people around her was a means of transmitting the dignity and power she achieved. She worked and lived simply, hoping for nothing and longing for nothing more than enjoying the freedom that cost her son his life. Although she had a limp and walked like a “three-legged dog” when she became free, she lived without complaint until her granddaughter was killed. The trauma resulting from the death created a downward spiral after Sethe’s discharge from jail. The joy of living, drained by the incident, gave her heart failure.

Baby Suggs knew the consequences of abjection the black female figure experiences. They guided her to the wisdom she achieves and that she passes on to her granddaughter Denver. Baby Suggs tells her the most important thing she can learn is about herself, that she should always listen to her body and love it, and never let the process of abjecting and the objectification of sexuality destroy her. “Slaves are not supposed to have pleasurable feelings on their own; their bodies not supposed to be like that, but they have to have as many children as they can to please whoever owned them. Still, they were not supposed to have pleasure deep down.” (Morrison, 1987). She knew the process well for she was beaten, knocked down, cursed, raped and called by variety of repellant names throughout her life as a slave (Morrison, 1987). Her only advice in simple speech was to stop fighting, live your life, and cherish your body.

Through this speech Morrison illustrates how women were objectified in slavery, how the process of making them a sexual object took place, and the ensuing consequences that affected the body and psyche of the black female figure. After the loss of her granddaughter, Baby Suggs became quiet and chose to stay in her room all day. She was alone/lonely after the rejection of the community in which they were

forced to live because of Sethe's deed, for she has become abjected, too. Eventually, she started to wither while longing for colors in her room, and finally her heart stops because of failure and loneliness.

Apart from Sethe and Baby Suggs, Beloved represents the child who is born in the tough times of slavery, and at the same time the babies who had to grow up with the physical and mental illnesses of their parents—the consequences of slavery. As a baby, Beloved did not witness any of this because her mother kills her while she was a toddler to save her from the abjection, violation and the oppression that slaves go through but, Baby Suggs, filled with remorse and guilt, is haunted by Beloved. In this way Morrison creates a supernatural/mythological figure that mirrors black people's souls, needs, and experiences. Obviously, Beloved is herself an abject figure between life and death, an entity that has disturbed the order of "nature". She is a warped reflection of the traumatized memories for her mother, of herself as a baby, and the memories of other people. Her mixed memories concern the songs which her mother used to sing to them, Sethe's diamonds, and the thoughts reaching back into the Middle Passage, consciousness from generations of dead. Furthermore, Morrison has presented Beloved's first appearance as a rebirth, because when Sethe saw her, "she broke water" (Morrison, 1987). Besides having baby soft skin, legs, and a childish appetite for sweet things, Beloved is presented as a child who needs to come back to this life to live and be a living, free person again.

Besides, Sethe has a craving for Beloved and everything related to her: her face, her memories, love, as well as the pleasures of life, such as sweets and food. Her needs as a baby brings her back to her mother, but she came with other memories that made her desire more than Sethe could imagine, a craving for what people who have been enslaved and abjected have always craved: Life. While Beloved begins life as a weak child, she gained strength in time, and her strength is in an inverse relationship with Sethe, for the more Beloved gains the weaker Sethe becomes. This transference of strength to weakness and weakness to strength is an example of the draining relationships black people in this novel have with their past, and how their memories and miseries have drained them of life, slowly weakening them until they die. It exemplifies their submissive relationship to their past, how this

submissiveness crushes them, and how they grasp a desperate need to redeem themselves and move on, or in Sethe's case, trying to do it all differently and save her child.

Beloved started observing the life around her and then begins asking Sethe questions about her past: "Your woman she never fix up your hair?" (Morrison, 1987), and "Where your diamonds" (Morrison, 1987). When Beloved is not asking questions, she does things that mystify Sethe. For example, how does she know the song that Sethe made up to sing to her children (Morrison,1987). When the song was never sung to her? All of these things convince Sethe that Beloved is indeed her daughter. She then starts to do penance for murdering her by serving her and attending to her needs. All the memories Beloved has brought have made her stronger and the former slaves Sethe and Paul D weaker, especially with the sense of guilt they both carry. By bringing up the past, Beloved exposes the walled-up memories that they chose to keep under lock and key and never discuss. Even if she lacked intention, Beloved can also be viewed as an avenger of past sins for her presence brings memories which cause Sethe and Paul D to hit bottom rock again.

Morrison has used the abject figures in Beloved to express the concealed, painful memories of the first generation of African people who came to America, and how the new generation lives like Beloved and her mother. Beloved, this figure who has come from the dead, represents the anger, the drive to live, and the need for a mother. Significantly, the only one who asked Beloved about her memories and where she came from is Denver. These memories cause her great pain, especially those that were not from her, such as this vivid memory of the Middle Passage:

> Some who eat nasty themselves I do not eat the men without skin bring us their morning water to drink we have none at night I cannot see the dead man on my face daylight comes through the cracks and I can see his locked eyes I am not big small rats do not wait for us to sleep someone is thrashing but there is no room to do it in if we had more to drink we could make tears we cannot make sweat or morning water so the men without skin bring us theirs one time they bring us sweet rocks to suck we are all trying to leave our bodies behind the man on my face has done it. It is hard to make yourself die forever you sleep short and then return in the beginning we could vomit now we do not. (Morrison, 1987)

Beloved possessed history. She lived African-American history in her psyche and in her personal life. She blamed Sethe over and over again for leaving her and for never seeing her or looking at her again. Her ancient memories are disturbing because she feels their experiences; the thirst, the heat, the sailors whom she describes without skin—rags and bones without color, containing and carrying the abjection that those people have witnessed. Hence, Beloved is presented as the rage of the people who were taken by force to live a history of oppression and violation. Finally, her role in the novel comes to an end as soon when her mother rewrites the story and instead of killing her, she kills a white man instead.

Generally, Beloved's relationships are confined to Sethe and Denver. Although she has been like a real sister to Denver, she drives her away from Sethe because Sethe is the reason Beloved comes back. And Beloved achieves what she has come for: She has a reckoning with her mother. By confronting the ghosts of the past, Beloved learns her mother's history (which is also her own), why Sethe has lived the life she has, and why she has done what she has done. In turn, this has a great effect on Sethe's life, giving her an opportunity to discover who her daughter is, something she did not have time to learn much about, and the experience taught her how she could have made different decisions, move in a different direction a long time ago.

However, after sucking the life out of Sethe, the people in Sethe's community learned of the existence of Beloved and chose to kick her out of Sethe's house because she made her very ill. At that time, Beloved was flourishing and pregnant while Sethe was very weak. Later on, the reader discovers it is as if Beloved has been waiting to see what will happen, what sort of history will form. People start chanting in front of the house, and white men are trampling their yard as Sethe begins hallucinating they've come to take her child, that the abduction is all happening again only this time she makes a different choice and takes the life of a white man. At that moment Beloved disappears from Sethe's life, which brings her peace. Beloved, the abject, vengeful phantom of justice for angry black souls, has been created to remind black people of their history, agony, and to secure and undeletable presence in the minds of the living.

Denver is completely different from all the previously discussed figures in the book. She represents the post slavery generation, those who have heard about slavery but have never personally experienced it; of course, they suffer along with their parents and experience the same abjection along with the degradation of various stereotypical images that affect their lives. In turn, because they are from a different generation, they face different challenges. Denver and her father are completely unfamiliar with slavery, as opposed to her two brothers and her grandmother Baby Suggs.

Through Denver, Morrison differentiates the psychology and thematic function of her characters, from the strong stubborn woman Sethe to the needy dependent Denver, who is afraid of simply going outside because she is scared. Like other characters common to Morrison, another young girl, this time Denver, experiences an abrupt shift in her life and personality from a dependent, shy, and introverted person, into a daring, responsible figure.

Born just after Sethe ran away from Sweet Home, Denver was named after Amy Denver, a white girl who helps Sethe deliver the baby. Notably, Denver and Sethe were the only people who could cope with the ghost of Beloved in their house. Whereas Sethe need to find redemption through Beloved, Denver's loneliness and her fear of her mother created her need to have her older sister as a companion. Leading a solitary life, she became used to having the ghost as it was only company aside from her mother, as the neighborhood she lived in knew there was a ghost in the house and avoided it. Denver chose this solitude and isolation, knowing her mother had killed her sister. In turn, this is how she has made from her abjection a new existence. Her life revolved around her mother, grandmother, and her baby sister's ghost, all so she isn't murdered as her sister was.

> All the time, I'm afraid the thing that happened that made it all right for my mother to kill my sister could happen again. I don't know what it is, I don't know who it is, but maybe there is something else terrible enough to make her do it again. I need to know what that thing might be, but I don't want to. Whatever it is, it comes from outside this house, outside the yard, and it can come right on in the yard if it wants to. So, I never leave this house and I watch over the yard, so it can't happen again and my mother won't have to kill me too. (Morrison, 1987)

Denver grew up with her mother, her grandmother, and the ghost of her baby girl. More than simply getting used to the ghost, Denver liked its presence, but when her sister Beloved appears, Beloved became more attached to Denver, and thus to the living rather than the dead. Notably, Denver loved the connection between her mother and Beloved, and she was very possessive about it. She took great pleasure in hearing her mother tell the story of how she gave birth to her. It made her feel she is part of her mother's history (Morrison, 1987). That she drank her sister's blood with her mother's milk made her believe that this is a sign of their strong bond (Morrison, 1987). Denver grows to believe that she is attached to them in a triangular relationship and is disturbed by any memory Sethe and Beloved have that doesn't include her. She needed to be included, to feel they were a family because all that she knew about being a family was from her mother and grandmother, who told her about her father and her two brothers. Later on, she tried to save Beloved from Sethe by preventing the history from writing itself into a circle of abjection again, but then she realized she must also save Sethe from Beloved.

Although Denver is presented as the least violated African American character in the novel, she still suffers quite a lot for her age, particularly from fear. She fears her mother, fears what might enter the family circle, fears finding herself alone without her mother or her sister, as well as the constant fear that creates her belief that she must keep watching the porch to save her mother and sister. Through her character, Morrison shows the mental status of a child who is lonely and lives in a house burdened by the traumatic memories of slavery and the ensuing reactions—the same that create the ghost Beloved. The existence of the fraught presence of abjection that so affects her mom also affects her life, the consequence of this remembered past combined with her own personality turns her into a timid yet hard-headed girl (Morrison, 1987). Finding herself suddenly responsible for keeping a roof over their head and food in the stomachs of two grownup women, she finds the strength to find a job to support them. Acting as their caretaker, and her willingness to take on work to provide for all helps her develop a brave, bold personality. It's as if she became a completely new person, strong enough to stop her mother from killing a white man and going to jail.

2.2 Colonial Abjection

To a great extent, African American women also suffered from abjection within a colonial context. Not only because their lands were invaded, they were taken by force or violated, but also because the societal and cultural aspects created in their freedom that were forcibly taken from them and replaced by the forms of abjection found in slavery. Being captive and abused added stress to how they were othered. Of course, more often than not they were anything but the image projected upon them, a stereotype or caricature based on white patriarchal standards of what slavery should be. The people who owned them thrust upon them the role of the uncivilized other and the abject, "the me that is not me". They were deprived of the right to get married, have a family, or a life of their own separate from the master they were bonded to. It is therefore fair to say African Americans in general were violated and oppressed because of their position at the bottom of the hierarchical pyramid, and it was black women who occupied the bottom of the bottom (Broussard, 2013), humiliated, oppressed, and abjected like Sethe and Baby Suggs.

Because who they were was based on their value as a commodity (Cooper, 2015) that could be sold, they were forced into the role of the repulsive abject. Black women faced a direct collision with the stereotypical images and standards of the white hegemonic system. Therefore, they suffered from what has been called double colonization, as both a colonized figure and as a woman as well.

Because they were considered the outsiders and repulsive others, their abjection mostly arrived in social and cultural forms: Abjection is "a way of describing an experience, an inherited… historical legacy, and a social condition defined and underlined by a defeat" (Scott, 2010). While his definition underlines the process of being abjected in just two lines for an entire race, which though over general, leads us directly to the historical, racial, inherited abjection that those women have experienced, and from which they suffered oppression and violation, as well as poverty, discrimination, and various other violations during the post slavery period.

This is all part of the greater white society's attempt to maintain a process of continual abjection from a time going back to their initial enslavement.

In contrast, though the white women in this society were considered less than men, in time they came to be respected. Black women did not have this opportunity. Though women in general were oppressed during this period, black women, confined during slavery to being the sexualized abject female figure, a machine for slave production, labor work and so on, were both oppressed and sexualized. Their lack of real status in the society allowed for the violation of the black female figure, an example of which is what happened to Sethe when she was denied a wedding, violated, whipped and sexually abused when nursing the Schoolmaster's nephews. It is in how Baby Suggs reacts that the reader understands the way different owners oppressed and violated her, whipped, cursed, and called her different names, and took her right to be a mother when her children were taken from her.

After slavery, most of African American women either worked at jobs that could barely provide them with food or were forced into prostitution as it offered an alternative to starving to death. This is a critical matter that Morrison presents through the character of Sethe and the prevailing situation at that time, where the African American female figure is being sexualized, though it is simply a survival strategy to take whatever job these women needed to get by. As Sethe says: "That has got to be something for a woman to do, and I got close to it myself when I got out of jail and bought, speak, your name" (Morrison, 1987). This shows that considering the possibility of becoming a prostitute was an inevitable consideration if the other option was starving to death. Through her characters, Morrison reveals these "emancipated" women had to give their body as a sacrifice to get what they needed. Of course, this means their bodies continued to be a mere commodity. The only difference from the times they had been enslaved and the period of emancipation was they now had the chance to starve to death.

Sethe chose the former option because, after being released from prison, she could not find a job, so she sells herself to pay for the headstone and having the name, date of birth and death chiselled on her baby girl's grave. She tells her dead

baby Beloved, “I went and got you a gravestone, but I didn't have money enough for the carving, so I exchanged (bartered, you might say)” (Morrison, 1987). Sethe was about to sell herself again because she needed money and no one wanted to help her, but she was saved at the last moment by finding a job as a cook.

Through the racialized gaze that sexualized them, black women were confined in a circle of abjection, for they were restricted to the role of otherness that had been designated for them; to be sexually objectified and a worker surviving on subsistence—barely a human being, though Sethe found a way to survive. Though she lost hope after losing three children, the presence of her daughter Denver keeps her alive. As an African American woman, she has seen too much and experienced too much. What she witnessed could suck a person into madness, but she refuses to give up for the sake of her last child.

2.3 Forming an Identity and The Fortified Existence

Obviously, black people were denied the right to form an identity of their own. The only identity they could hold is what the white people gave them through the receipt that came with them when bought (Morrison, 1987). They are defined and subjected to colonization because “definitions belonged to the definers- not the defined” (Morrison, 1987). This critical aspect is important to recall in reading *Beloved*. In Baby Suggs character, Morrison is presenting a certain side of abjection through the power of naming and the carelessness of being unnamed. Concerning her name, she says “I don’t call myself anything” (Morrison, 1987), Morrison has simply revealed another side of abjection, for according to Speight…

> This is not an expression of losing one’s identity momentarily or struggling to figure out who one really is. This is an expression of never having had an identity because one has been dehumanized to the point of total abjection. (2017)

Morrison shows why African American people have been in a circle of total abjection so deep that they found it hard to identify themselves; they have lost the ability to maintain or create an identity of their own. Here Morrison presents the loss of identity and abjection through Baby Suggs and also how the only identity that she achieved after slavery was through her husband: “Anything, but Suggs is what my husband name” (Morrison, 1987), for both were named after their former owner “Whitlow”, and their names came with their sale ticket. But her husband chooses to select names for the both of them so they can find each other if they run away. Suggs takes her name from her shared and sometimes joyful past with her husband (Speight, 2017).

On the other hand, there is power in the refusing to name oneself:

> Is that within the black abject- within human abjection as represented and lived in the experience of being-black, of blackness- we may find that the zone of self or personhood extends into realms where we would not ordinarily perceive its presence; and that suffering seems, at some level or at some far-flung contact point, to merge into something like ability, like power (and certainly, like pleasure) without denying what it is to suffer. (Scott, 2010)

When she was a slave, Baby Suggs refused to call herself anything because having a name and an identity meant nothing. But as soon as she felt the presence of freedom rushing into her head and heart, she decided to choose the name her husband used to call her, one that will draw a picture of possibility in the new being that she hopes to become: a free, independent human being. Her refusal to accept her master’s name implies a certain, healthy acceptance of abjection, especially for Baby Suggs. By accepting and embracing abjection she makes it possible to continue living peacefully.

After slavery, most of the former slaves fought the process of accepting abjection, a similar experience to the oppression and humiliation Sethe feels, who in time is “poisoned” till she falls apart at the end of the novel as a consequence of locking all that anger and hatred inside, whereas Baby Suggs and Denver managed to embrace abjection and to lead lives filled with gratitude at the freedom and new life they achieved. By embracing their abjection, Baby Suggs and Denver turn it into a source of power. They have chosen to build their own liminal space in that society by

creating their own space within abjection. In this space Baby Suggs preaches and helps people to get over their pasts while encourage them to find a new way forward:

> What Baby Suggs offers in the Clearing is not the hard rule of a patriarchal and hierarchal church, but a literal open space where the black community, free people and ex-slaves, can learn to love themselves in a world that actively does not want them to. (Speight, 2017)

She is teaching the ex-slaves and the new generation how to love themselves and accept their abjection by helping them turn it into a strength. Sethe's reality is completely the opposite. By refusing to surrender to the existing reality of abjection, she chooses to abject herself by killing her daughter. Though many judge that she could had a different approach, Sethe sees no other way out. By killing her daughter, she believes she has saved herself and children from going back to the old regime of slavery, for she believes she has kept them from what she knows is terrible (Morrison, 1987). Although keeping her daughter alive would have been better for her mental condition, she chose to kill her to proclaim her right to full ownership her children as a mother, her right to own her freedom to make the decision to kill, and her right to be a human being. Her self-abjection is a way to proclaim her subjectivity and identity by differentiating herself from her surroundings.

CHAPTER THREE

3. Post Emancipaton Abjection

By 1865, by and large, the lives of the African American people had changed dramatically despite the challenges they faced, something that was especially true after the ratification of the thirteenth amendment of the U.S. Constitution that formally emancipated "over 4 million blacks in former slaveholding states" (Ruef & Fletcher, 2003). While African Americans technically gained political freedom and had the right to work where they wished, this legislation did not stop the discrimination directed against the entire race, for the same social structure continued to exist, and there was very little change in the shape of their lives (Ruef & Fletcher, 2003). Their freedom came with a price they continue to pay to this day.

Morrison has addressed these same issues through her novel *Paradise*. In it she exposes the journey of abjection, oppression, and the violation of black people in the United States after the emancipation. These varied social forces caused black people to run from the greater white society, thus creating an all-black society away from them. Ironically, she shows how these negative forces continued to haunt black society when the same male-dominated hierarchy reestablishes itself in their society, but in a somewhat different form. Implicitly, Morrison places greater emphasis on the abject black female figures that partake in this journey, their feminine role and social status, as well as the situations creating the abjection they experience through different characters.

This chapter is committed to presenting the continuous abjection of the black female figure as she journeys through *Paradise*. Through this novel, Morrison presents how the female figure is being oppressed and abjected in black and white society from both the white and black male figures. Through the different female

characters in the novel, she explicates the different ways these women have been violated; through social status, oppression, abjection, sexuality, and a negative view of the African American woman regarding her view of her own character.

Through a deep analysis of the societal structure of these societies and their relationship to the characters of *Paradise*, the abjection these women experience reveals the status of the black female figure in the post-emancipation period.

3.1 *Paradise*: The Continuous Journey of Otherness

Paradise, as with many of Morrison's novels, is based on a true incident that happened in Mexico, where a group of men violently attacked black nuns in a cathedral. The incident created many questions in Morrison's mind, and the basic one was this: "How could they do it? How could they put their fingers on a trigger and then pull… How could they shoot some girls for whatever reason…" (Morrison, 2019). In all her novels Morrison shows women being violated, but in *Paradise*, Morrison introduces the abject black female figure tethered to various critical questions such as the one posed above. By drawing lines from her major characters to the forms of abjection they have witnessed or suffered in their journey, she manages to sketch and color other critical aspects of the lives of the African American people in general and the women specifically, how they have lived and survived during that period, and how African Americans created all-black societies that were supposed to be a paradise of their own.

The novel starts at the Convent, where a group of men have attacked, shot, and killed the white Woman with reckless violence, while the black ones who lived there have escaped. Later on, the story of the town of Ruby comes to be revealed along with the other stories of the main characters of the novel.

In a town called Ruby in the middle of nowhere, in Oklahoma, black families that have escaped from oppression in the greater white society have settled down and created an all-black society of their own, so they could flourish, raise children away from the abjection that haunts them in the greater, white-controlled society and create their own paradise. But it is not a paradise that follows the residents into their town. Friction develops between the patriarchy of men who have settled in Ruby and the five women who live in the Convent. Morrison named the novel Paradise to drawn attention to the irony inherent in the name: "It is an interrogation of the whole idea of paradise. It's a thing we think about. Imagine even in this life or another. All humans do. But when you come up with a solution it's always sort of limited in some way." (Morrison, 2019). Their need to create a paradise, an Eden they can call their own creates tragedy instead. They become a very constricted society that rejects the outsiders whether black or white, and is repelled by that which is different, especially the celibate women living at Convent. Hence, "Their long march to Oklahoma and the ultimate settlement can be compared to Puritan quest of promise land and their exclusion to the natives" where "The quest of their so-called promise land turns to be violent as they unsettle the owner of the home—Native American." (Bhandari, 2013) This is exactly what the nine black families who settle in Ruby do.

Exhibiting its emphasis on the women and the conditions they face, *Paradise* consists of nine chapters, each one of them labeled with the name of one of the female characters in the novel except the first chapter, which is called Ruby after the town. The names of the chapters belong either to the women who have been residing in the Convent, such as Mavis, Grace, Seneca, Pallas, and Consolata, or citizens in that town, like Patricia, Lone, and the child Save-Marie. Because of the power of this nascent matriarchy, the men of Ruby plan to destroy, kill, or throw them out as the Convent and its residents have become foils for the patriarchal order of Ruby (Slaughter, 2000). Nevertheless, the abjection of those women has been a crucial part of the lives of all of those women, whether they reside at the Convent or are part of Ruby.

Mavis Albright, who is introduced in the second chapter named Mavis, is the first woman to arrive at the convent. She is first presented as "a stereotype of a

victimized, battered woman" (Lonien, 2009), which is logical as her husband used to beat and rape her. An oppressed mother of five children, two of whom, twin toddlers, suffocated in the car while she was shopping, Mavis becomes paranoid and escapes from her house because she is certain that her husband and children are planning to kill her (Morrison, 1997). She finally arrives at the Convent, which is seventeen miles south of a town called Ruby. There she meets and befriends Connie, an old woman who lives there.

Through Mavis, Morrison presents the weary housewife that has been sexually objectified, abjected, and oppressed by the powers that be, restricting her life choices to being a housewife, and as the wife of an oppressive man she has reason to feel distress by her life. Her character goes through a noticeable shift in the pages of the book. When she is first introduced, she is first described as a lifeless doll; "She could have been a life-size Raggedy Ann" (Morrison, 1997). Comparing her to a stuffed doll that is only as active as the person commanding it wishes, she is presented as a silenced, oppressed, and sexualized being within the confines of her life. This changes the moment she runs away as she thus establishes, for the first time, agency for herself.

Just as importantly, Mavis is one of the characters in *Paradise* that sees herself through the eyes of others. She sees herself as a reflection in the eyes of her husband Frank, for she has been a completely submissive figure who looks for approval in the eyes of her companions. Because of the abjection that she experiences, she believes herself to be "the dumbest bitch on the planet" (Morrison, 1997). She is utterly changed by her escape and ensuing life at the Convent: "It was more proof that the old Mavis was dead. The one who couldn't defend herself from an eleven-year-old girl, let alone her husband" (Morrison, 1997). She is transformed from a submissive, cowering abject human into a strong, independent, and fearless figure.

The next character to arrive at the convent is Grace—also known as Gigi. She is a liberated young woman who likes rambling around the country. Through her character, Morrison introduces the younger generation. Freed of the many constraints of the past. She is a free soul open to experiencing new things. She is led to believe

she only had her grandfather for family, but at the end of the novel she discovers her father did not abandon her but was serving life in prison.

Grace is cavorting around, but after participating in a demonstration against the status quo, in which she is separated from her boyfriend Mikey, who is sent to jail for three months, she ends up at the Convent. Moreover, shocked by the abject violence young blacks experience during these demonstrations, so she decides to look for the rock formation Mikey have told her about in the middle of the desert that looks like a man and a woman having sex (Morrison, 1997) for this is the place they agreed to meet if they lost one another. Her search went on in vain because she could not find this rock and nobody knew what she was talking about. Disappointed by her journey, she meets an old man on a train who tells her about the story of two old trees intertwined and twisted around each other in a town called Ruby, which in turn is the reason she goes to Ruby and then discovers the Convent.

Grace's journeys have affected deeply, for she "used to be an idealistic woman with a fighting spirit. As a member of the Black Power movement. Disheartened by her experiences, Gigi abandons her political ideals and reverts to overt sexuality, thriving on the longing gazes of men." (Lonien, 2009). After livg at the Convent, she chooses to form a sexual relationship with K.D., a nephew of one of the members of the Morgan family, which founded Ruby. However, she discovers her attempt at being sexually liberated does not provide her with the satisfaction she had hoped for deep down in her soul. She continues to suffer, leading to self-flagellation…

> No, you stupid, stupid bitch. Because you weren't tough enough. Smart enough. Like with every other goddamn thing you got no staying power. You thought it was going to be fun and that it would work. In season or two. You thought we were hot lava and when they broke us down into sand, you ran. (Morrison, 1997)

Her decision is a direct result of an attempt to escape the haunting image of the boy spitting up blood. She reduces her world to the corporeality of her body but ends becoming abjected and losing herself in the process (Lonien, 2009). Thus, she ends up lost in lamentations until Connie steps in and helps everyone who washes up at the Convent, as she teaches them how to deal with the ruin they feel in body and

soul: “I will teach you what you are hungry for” (Morrison, 1997). She teaches them to tolerate their sorrow and make it a point of strength in their characters.

Gigi, on the other hand, has been sexually objectified by the male gaze of Ruby’s boys, especially K. D, as he has a sexual relationship with her, but he ends up marrying one of Ruby’s girls because, as an established townsperson, he is not allowed to marry an outsider.

Of course, Gigi is abjected and judged negatively by the people of the town regarding the way she dresses and acts, for they want to differentiate themselves from, the lustful, disrespectful, Jezebel image they tailor for her. Although she means them no harm, her existence is a threat to the men and women of Ruby, for her liberated life is opposite of the repressed, perfect black female figure. It is yet another reason the women at the convent must be eliminated.

The third character that arrives and stays at the convent is Seneca. Her mother abandoned her when she was five years old—though she believed she was abandoned by her sister. She is quickly thrust into the experiences of an abject life; she is raped in the different foster care homes she finds herself in, abused by boyfriends, and harassed by strange men in the streets. She realized “by then she knew there was something inside her that made boys snatch her and men flash her” (Morrison, 1997). Living this way silences her voice because she doesn’t believe anyone will believe her, just as no one believed her when she was silenced after the first time she was raped in her first foster care. As a direct result of the trauma in different foster care homes she entered, she went homeless for quite a while, all the time trying to cover her terrible fears, while at the same time, trying to please everyone so that she would not be abandoned anymore.

Seneca is yet another character in *Paradise* that perceives herself through her environment and its world. This is why she believes that the constant harassment is her fault. She believes she is “hopeless” because this is what her boyfriend tells her (Morrison, 1997). Both Seneca and Mavis judge themselves by the negative judgements of others, thus creating abjection in themselves: They have been treated

that way for so long they believed that they are worthless and stupid. Simply put, they have very low self-esteem.

On the other hand, “The triggering of repeated rape makes Seneca lives in a continuous panic which she cannot distinguish from her everyday life” (Yasir Abed & Bin Janoory, 2018). This constant harassment creates in her abject feelings. Moreover, she has been sexually objectified, groomed by an old woman who is a pimp for prostitution who takes her to her house for few days’ work and then pays her five hundred dollars. Eventually, the abusive life Seneca has led creates a psychological crisis where she feels the need to practice self-harm by constantly cutting herself. “This hysterical behavior is an embodiment of the destruction of her psyche resulting from her sexual molestation.” (Yasir Abed & Bin Janoory, 2018). Her behavior may also be considered a way of gaining control over her body, as constant cutting and the ensuing bleeding are the only things she can control.

After the imprisonment of her abusive boyfriend, Seneca goes on a journey to meet her mother in order to find the money to hire him a lawyer, but failing in this attempt, she chooses to travel aimlessly because “She preferred traveling resolutely nowhere closed off from society, hidden among quiet cargo no one knowing she was there.” (Morrison, 1997). This continued until one day she saw Sweety—one of Ruby’s citizens—and followed her to the convent. She stays there while she learns to control her life, and by achieving control over her abject impulses, she stops cutting herself.

The character Pallas is a young girl who grew up with a wealthy father and her brother. “She is shown to be modest, trusting and tender-minded.” (Prabha, 2016). However, because of her trusting character, she must experience betrayal. One day she falls in love with the janitor of her school Carlos and decided to go on a road trip to Mexico with him to pay a visit to her mother Dede, who is “known as Divine”. She finds her mother but later discovers Carlos and her mother are having a sexual relationship. It was this " betrayal, the hurt, that had driven from her mother's house" (Morrison, 1997) that made her leave her immediately after discovering the truth, which led to her having a car accident.

She continues running and, on her way to nowhere, she is raped by strangers. This creates not just the trauma of violent sexual objectification but she also becomes pregnant. The trauma of the incident causes her to lose the ability to speak to anyone as she discovers that her vocal cords no longer work (Morrison, 1997). She loses her free and easy life as a teenager to become a mother because of a violent, unwanted pregnancy. Despite all the terrible things that have happened, she decides to keep the child and name it Dede after her mother. By finding her way to the Convent she again attains a stable life; she regains her ability to talk, gives birth to her child and begins developing a decisive, adult personality.

The last character to be introduced is Consolata Sosa, better known as "Connie". Although she is mentioned many times, her real story is revealed at the end of the book. She is introduced as a lost Brazilian girl who has lived in the streets and is use to experiencing abuse and rape until the nun Mary Magna finds her and takes her to Oklahoma, where she and other nuns have created a religious school for educating native girls. After that Connie considers Mary Magna as her mother and introduces her as such.

By the time we meet Connie, she has practically she spent half of her life at the Convent. She gets into a relationship with Deacon "Deek", the son of a founding father of Ruby. After a period of time, Deek dumps her without telling her why. Years pass before Connie learns her tough lesson from this, for according to Morrison:

> The lesson held Consolata in good stead, and she hardly noticed the things she was losing. The first to go were the rudiments of her first language. Every now and then she found herself speaking and thinking in that in-between place, the valley between the regulations of the first language and the vocabulary of the second. The next thing to disappear was embarrassment. Finally she lost the ability to bear light. (Morrison, 1997)

She lost many things that had been essential parts of who she is, for although she did not choose the monastic life that was imposed on her, she was safe from harassment and abuse, had a home, and a person she considered family. However, Connie also bears a burden for having suffered from sexual objectification twice: First as a little

girl living in the street where was sexually harassed and raped, and secondly by Deek, who entered into what she believed was a true, deep relationship, but in time he decided his caste in the social strata was more important than her. She was the opposite of what most men in Ruby desired as she was light-skinned, green-eyed, and an outsider.

But in time Connie becomes a sort of guru for these broken women. She takes them emotionally from their abject situation, life, and feelings, the weight they have been carrying and lightens their load. At first, she let them stay at the Convent without asking anything of them, but in the end, she encourages "them to dream loudly, how to retell their experiences, retell all the bad memories and difficulties loudly and in front of the other women" (Yasir Abed & Bin January, 2018). Connie knew all of what they suffered from the first time she saw each one. She knows their hearts because she understands fear: "Scary things not always outside. Most scary things is inside" (Morrison, 1997), she tells Mavis. It is these scary things that have damaged the souls of these women. Moreover, Connie helps other women from Ruby, like Arnette, Sweetie, and Billie Delia. In the safety of the convent these women gather. It is in this liminal space they may transform, away from the abjection and the abject life they had before as:

> All the women are from different backgrounds and none of them get a safe and free home. They are abused by different persons in their family life. So they are un-homed as well as homeless. When they all reside in the Convent, it becomes their home because they can get the belongingness, freedom and safety that one gets at home. (Bhandari, 2013)

Thus, the convent becomes a healing place, a sanctuary for these women.

Morrison discusses each story of these women individually, revealing their past and why and how they came to the convent. She concentrates on their individuality to provide a foil to the stereotypical images African American women are typecast in, which is, as Lonien points out, why these women must be removed from the area around Ruby as they provide alternative role models the patriarchy doesn't wish seen: "The women present a mockery of those pure, pastel-colored Negro ladies and threaten Ruby's hard-won utopian space of racial and moral purity and therefore, they have to die" (Lonien, 2009). Their otherness, their difference is what motivated

the crimes of the men of Ruby. Abjected for being different from the citizens of Ruby, they are the repulsive other, which is how Morrison describes them: “go-go girls: pink shorts, skimpy tops, see-through skirts; painted eyes, no lipstick; obviously no underwear, no stockings. Jezebel's storehouse raided to decorate arms, earlobes, necks, ankles, and even a nostril” (Morrison, 1997). They are the complete opposite of the image of the typical African American housewife that the men of Ruby traffic in. In fact, those women at the convent are considered anything but ordinary women, for “Out There, the black could be overthrown from the subject position and reduced to the object position of a “sport” or “quarry,” which is none other than the status of a slave” (Tsai, 2008).

3.2 Post-Colonial Abjection in Black Societies

After the post-Emancipation period, African Americans continued to be abjected and humiliated for having a skin color other than white. They also witnessed a new form of racism that pitted those with even just a trace of African blood against their darker brethren; “light-skinned against black.” (Morrison, 1997). It was discrimination that caused many black families to leave their farms, plantations and hometowns to find a new place to live, free from the racial perils they faced. “This otherness and exploitation propagated through racial discrimination directs them to build a complete black town” (Bhandari, 2013). Ruby is such a place. Eight families band together, traveled through the desert until they settled down. “Except for three or four, they were coal black, athletic, with non-committal eyes. All of them maintained an icy suspicion of outsiders. Otherwise, they were like all small black communities: protective, God-loving, thrifty but not miserly” (Morrison, 1997).

These eight families, called the Eight-Rock families, soon established a system that discriminates not just against outsiders but those who have lighter skin. They make “color central to their personal as well as their communal identity.” (Jimoh, 2003), thus becoming the judgmental and oppressive power of abjection they had

escaped from. They not only reject white-skinned people but also the light-skinned black people like Patricia “Pat” and her daughter Billie Delia. Because the citizens of Ruby consider themselves superior, the light-skinned people are a defect: “We were the first visible glitch” (Morrison, 1997).

So, light-skinned African Americans are abjected, rejected, and unwelcome in Ruby. This is why they refused to help Pat’s mother while she was giving birth, which in turn is the cause her death. It’s why they reject Billie Delia from early childhood. The people of Ruby made the color of skin matter because they have suffered discrimination because of the color of their skin. No one in Ruby will marry the women of the Convent because the citizens of Ruby labor under the believe they should maintain their most distinctive feature (their darkness), which is a mark of the originality of their race. If someone marries a light-skinned woman, like Pat’s father did, they will lose their social position and become an outsider.

But though they have succeeded in creating an all-black town and managed to prosper in the middle of nowhere, they become a duplicate of the great, white-dominated society they have abandoned. "Under the degrading pressures of a racist and capitalist society, they replicate what has victimized them, reproducing the values of the slave-holding culture that made them homeless” (Slaughter, 2000). Although Pat and her daughter grew old living according to the customs of Ruby, they conformed to its social convention, unlike the women at the convent who were light-skinned and didn’t conform to the rules of behavior established by the people in Ruby

This is why the women at the convent were the ultimate threat to the men of Ruby, who were proud not only of their bloodline and their skin color, but also of their women, for they never worked in a white man's kitchen, nursed a white child, or were harassed or raped by a white man (Morrison, 1997). And other abject situations that African American women experienced. To avoid their women being tainted, the men of Ruby try to maintain the pure image of the African American female figure as sexual integrity and purity of the black woman is equally the salvation of the black man (Slaughter, 2000). The women at the convent come from many places and are

seen as impure. Many of course were rape, but they might also have worked in a white man's kitchen or nursed a white baby. Who knows what they did in their "degraded" past? Perhaps they were too liberated, lived alone without men, were able to express their sexuality freely. Their abjection and liberation stood in contradiction to what the men of the town of Rudy aspired to. for according to Morison:

> They have male fears? Which is they feel beseeched. They feel that when women are loose anything can happen. If you can't control the race? If you can't levy taxes? You can't decide who is legitimate and who is not. You can't decide to whom the children belong and you can't tell the women what to do. Then you have no authority for these men. (Morrison, 2019)

Consequently, the existence of the woman at the convent is a grave danger to their social and cultural standards. They decide to attack these women as they are seen to characterized all that is repulsive, different, inappropriate, and wild.

The decision of the men of Rudy to eliminate the women of the convent comes from fear, for the men of Ruby were the type of people who "were worried about stirring up things" (Morrison, 2019), and those women had already been stirring things up. The men lived in fear; fear of change, fear of a new way of dressing, thinking, and living, but most of all, fear of being forced to leave their town—just like what happened to them when they were forced by white and light-skinned people to leave the previous black town they established called "Haven".

Obviously, this mentality has led them to abhor and reject anything that deviated from the norm they established. By considering light-skinned people and most of the women at the convent as the other, the abject that they differentiate themselves from, they chose to blame anything bad that happens in Ruby on these women, since "one thing that connected all these catastrophes was in the Convent. And in the Convent were those women." (Morrison, 1997). By eliminating them, the men of Ruby are eliminating the repulsive abject behind all things they fear, and they believe by accomplishing this goal, life in Ruby will go back to "normal", to the way thing were when they felt safe.

As we can see this circle of abjection leads African American people to murder African American people, killing in turn both white and black woman. Abjection directed from the minority of a minority to a small group of dissenters, if not of their own gender, then marked by indelible similarities of race.

3.3 Identity Subjectivity and Womanhood.

The position of women in *Paradise* has two sides. The first represents the women in Ruby. The carry the burden of their traditional constructs as typical housewives and mothers. The second is of course represented by the women at the convent. Therewith, Yasir Abed & Bin Janoory has indicated that Morrison's *Paradise* at a certain point did present:

> The deprivation of women rights and voice and reduce their role to housekeeping, production and pleasing men. Women are placed like an object in their society. But women revolt against their dilemma and begin to gradually obtain their identity. They flee from Ruby and its male domination and find shelter in Convent which is inhabited only by women who depend on each other in everything. (Yasir Abed & Bin Janoory, 2018)

Mavis is an example of this. Having been restricted to being a mother and a housewife, she eventually runs away and takes refuge at the convent where she becomes a completely different person. The same is true of Billie Delia, a citizen of Ruby, who confesses that "What she saw and learned there changed her forever" (Morrison, 1997). After leaving the convent she becomes a different person from the one who first arrived there. She is mentally stronger, more independent, and more certain about what she wants to do. Her realization made her see that Ruby is no place for people like her since she would keep living there in an abject state, forever a light-skinned girl, the result of a "bad choice" by one of Ruby's citizens, and that she will never belong to the town nor her people. She leaves Ruby and starts working in a clinic outside the town.

The convent becomes the place where transformations like this happen, a sanctuary for all the women who find their way there, whether from the town like Billie Delia, or from out of the town like Connie, Mavis, Gigi, Seneca, and Pallas. It becomes a real home for them, not like the houses they used to live in that were anything but homes, because, "one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist" (Hook, 2015). They didn't know how to resist abjection and loss of self-esteem until they came to the convent. It became the one place they could not leave although it was the one place they were free to leave. They stayed until "they lost the days" (Morrison, 1997. The convent is to be considered a real liminal space where the pieces are made into the whole, for according to Lonien: "The fact that Mavis senses the presence of her dead children hints at the Convent being a liminal space of blurred boundaries, not only between the world of the living and the dead, but also between interior and exterior, past and present." (Lonien, 2009). Thus, by residing at a place which lies in the middle of life and death, one's own self and the outside world, their oppressive past and their soon to be liberated future provides them with a new existence, a new understanding, as well as a new destination in their lives. Their residence at the convent was never compulsory. They chose it since they felt the changes that happened to them while staying there, a road to personal freedom in a liberated space away from the society that abjected them.

The constant abuse, harassment, rape, and abandonment that so many women at the Convent witnessed or experienced forced them into a state of abjection, which in turn led them to form new subjectivities. With the help of Connie, who taught them to share their stories, they managed to get past what in the past destroyed them. These stories became "remedial strategies to get rid of their tragic experiences because abjection comes from sharing others' experiences." (Yasir Abed & Bin Janoory, 2018). She makes the cellar of the convent a place of healing where they were able to cross beyond the boundaries constraining them from becoming whole, strong women. By dreaming aloud, by entering into each other's dreams and experiencing what each has witnessed, bonds are formed that bring them closer, made them stronger and build a strong feminine connection among each of them—even between Mavis and Gigi, who would get into fights all the time. They became

quieter and calmer after they reached their peaceful zone, where their trauma become no more than dust and their appreciation for their life becomes clearer than ever. While staying at the convent these women learn what lies inside them, for:

> What is significant is that when the women are in their own space they learn to speak their own language and are not weighed down and silenced by the language and narrative of the patriarchs. Rather, this is a space which Connie provides that enables them their shame, pain, fear, and that offers them nurture, strength, hope and forgiveness. (Slaughter, 2000)

The language is a silence where they connect to each other spiritually. By doing so, they create a language that enables them to get past all the hard time they went through. They learn how to sculpt their new identity and subjectivity, both of which stand in opposition to the sense of self they had before coming to the convent.

All these women became stronger by using the feminine bonds they develop that enabled them to overcome the shattered relationships they had in the past. They completed each other through support and sympathy, and their unique relationships cement a bond that strengthens them. “The Convent women, on the other hand, establish a new religion, a new law of love, pity and compassion……Nevertheless it is sketched in a way that suggests a maternal alternative to the paternal law of Ruby.” (Slaughter, 2000). This kind of relationship helped these women build their unique solidarity. Women from different places have helped each other create a life, identity, and subjectivity away from the abjection directed towards them by the outside world. Through such a relationship, the women at the convent have used their liminal space to help them secure a strong place in society. They have embraced their abjection as a way of proclaiming an identity, what Kristeva calls “the fortified existence”, and they chose to be abject in a circle of others who are abject in order to gain a new identity that differentiates them from people who stand outside this circle.

At the end of the novel, when the men of Rudy attack the convent, they are shocked to discover bald women with fierce and fearless eyes defending it. “Each of the women reappears or is imagined as a spirit appearing in her former life, only this time they appear not as victims but as a powerful force, 'bodacious black Eves' who redeem the formerly tragic lives they had left.” (Slaughter, 2000). Thus, Mavis appears as a strong free person, and she keeps in touch with her kids, Pallas is

completely different from what she was, and as a mom, Gigi appears more powerful, decisive. Now a strong female figure, she joins the military, Seneca goes back to where she once lived in abject trauma and fear and creates an ordinary life free of stress. Though Connie is murdered, she is resurrected and becomes one with Piedade, a goddess figure, and they reside in a heaven-like place. Morrison show how all the women of the convent, through solidarity and understand and benign leadership, may follow new paths.

CONCLUSION

Although Kristeva's theory of abjection is based on societal condition affecting an individual, as in sociology and psychology, it is a crucial concept of the literary analysis used in this paper. The paper demonstrates the destructive effects when people are categorized, stereotyped, or discriminated against through a gaze that either has abjected them or confined them in a circle of abjection for being different from the "normal". Hence, the abject becomes a representation of the outsider figure, one that defies the customs and norms of the society, a figure that soils the "perfect" image of its surroundings.

Kristeva indicated that although abjection is a repulsive act that directs one thing against another—like the abhorrence of the skin on hot milk—it can also sometimes occur by itself in order to differentiate him/herself from the liking and preferencing of others, where accordingly, the abject also becomes a matter of drawing up a character to proclaim one's identity. Moreover, she also has identified several places within a locus in abjection that she calls the fortified existence and the liminal space, which occurs when one embraces their abjection. Abjection in its turn becomes the fortified existence of this person as well as its own sanctuary, since according to Kristeva: "Abject and abjection are my safe-guards. The primers of my culture" (1982). They are way to show strength because they are being embraced.

For some time, discrimination against women is a specific act of abjection that has been a critical matter to most feminists, as well as other theorists, activists, and writers. Women from around the world, like Helen Cixous, Virginia Wolf, Luce Irigaray, and many others have worked to end this attitude.

African American women have been confined in a circle of abjection from the day they were sold in auctions and colonized. "What happened on that auction block centuries ago is still unfinished business for African American women today" (Wyatt, 1997). The consequences of this process of racializing and therefore

abjecting affect them today. By considering the black female figure as the other, the same society that have allowed for them to be sold, objectified, sexualize, and oppressed during the slavery period, causing them to lose their identity and subjectivity, created the stereotypical images that we affixed to the abject image of the African-American female figure.

The abjection of the African American women through the post-emancipation period was an extension of the one created in slavery. These women were trapped in the process of abjection through constant the sexualization and stereotyping that were imposed on theme. African American women during the emancipation period were abjected in both white and black societies; white society abjected them as former slaves, while black society judged them for being either light-skinned or dark-skinned, for being somehow different from the typical ideal image which was created by the same black society.

This abjection of the African-American women continues till the present day. One of the most significant images that was caught in the stereotyping fixative bath of time is that of Jezebel, a sexualized illustration of the African American female figure created as a consequence of the sexualization of the African women through the slavery period. This takes place because of the sexual myths that have been created. In turn these historical condition help propagated a sexualized image of the black female figure through contemporary media and cinema.

This journey of abjection is a major concern of Toni Morrison in her novels *Beloved* and *Paradise*. In *Beloved* she reveals the abjection that African and African-American women experience during slavery through her many female characters, such as Sethe, Baby Suggs, Beloved, and Denver. Through them Morrison reveals the journey of abjection from the first generation that comes from Africa, presented in the person of Sethe's mother, until the birth of Denver, the first generation born after slavery.

Morrison reveals how these women became commodities; how they were used to breed more slaves and then became the sexualized property to their white owners. Of course, they were raped, harassed, and abused because they were considered

inferior to the white female figure, and therefore lacked the social status to defend themselves.

Through her practicing infanticide, Sethe, the major character whom the story revolves around in *Beloved*, becomes twice abjected. For her, being categorized as abject has led to her "monstrification". "As Sethe is deemed 'other' due to her skin color, history, and actions, she can then be made into a monster – the monstrification does not exist without the othering in the context of the black slave mother" (Sadati, 2020). The constant abjection that Sethe suffers from enslaved, leads her to practice infanticide, thus making her the Monstrous abject that the people in her society differentiate themselves from.

Denver and Baby Suggs also suffer abjection from white and African American society. The first abjection they experience was by white people and is based on the cultural and societal values, the differences based on race which make them repulsive. They also suffer from the abjection of black people because Sethe commits infanticide, and Baby Suggs dies as a consequence of their abjection, for she isolates herself from that society because they judge her and find her guilty. While Denver grows up without friends as a consequence of the circle of abjection her family was confined in, the ghost like figure of Beloved exists in a space between the dead and the living.

In *Paradise*, Morrison discusses the abjection of the black female figure in both white and black society, but within the grounds of the Convent she does not specify who is white or black. In fact, the first woman to be killed in the attack on the convent is white. "Morrison's portrayal of ethnically nonspecific women at the convent, where skin color does not matter, challenges the color-consciousness of her readers." (Jimoh, 2003). Instead of dwelling on race, she focuses on the abjection these women have experienced. She presents different women of different backgrounds who have been discriminated against and abjected in both societies. As Morrison says: "I wanted to underscore how we distort race. How we have so much baggage ourselves as readers that we bring to a narrative that we know if you don't say somebody's. The interviewer: you assume it's white. Morrison: That's right.

That's true in literature. If you say they're black then they're black. If you don't identify race the assumption is that they're white" (Morrison, 2018).

Consequently, whether the women of Ruby or the women of the Convent are being discussed, both are part of Morrison's circle of abjection that confined them to the Convent. For women, the word confinement often means protection, as when they are confined in labor, or sequestered during their periods according to certain cultural traditions. But confinement also may suggest prison, involuntarily serving time without recourse to personal freedom. This is most certainly true in this case as where else would these women go?

The confinement offered by the sanctuary is open to the women of Ruby like Pat, her mother, and her daughter, who have been discriminated against because they are light-skinned, while Ione and Anna Flood have been abjected for being outsiders. So too it may be said the women at the convent have been abjected because their past, habits and beliefs are different from the people in the town, and it is these differences that defied the customs of Ruby and its demands for conformity. The people of Ruby believe these difference must be eliminated.

Besides the circle of abjection that confines women in both these novels, the embracing of that abjection become a point of strength for them. This is equivalent to Kristeva's fortified existence and the liminal. This embracing of the abject, the other, and the monstrous in some cases is a point of strength according to feminists like Helen Cixous, who uses the monster figure Medusa in her work. Angela Carter also uses the animal figure in her writing, and Barbara Creed use of the Monstrous Feminine refers to the patriarchal, one-dimensional women in horror films. All of these theorists, through these figures they investigate, proclaimed feminine power, subjectivity, and identity.

Therefore, the embracing of the abjection process is a matter of letting abjection enter to create a fortified existence in a hostile society, which enables women to proclaim their identity and subjectivity. One forms of embracing one's abjection is expressed through the naming of Baby Suggs. At first, she is caught in complete abjection regarding her identity, which the reader experiences when she says she

didn't call herself any name, that she has no name. This indicates her conscious acceptance of that abjection, for identity also meant nothing to her while she was a slave. Upon gaining freedom, she names herself what her husband calls her, not by the names that come with the paperwork that accompanied her as a slave. By choosing her name, she differentiates herself from the destructive forms of the abject and enters an existence fortified by the first, primal acquisition from her freedom: The right to choose her name.

Paradise presents the convent as the liminal space of its abjected women, since "the convent is situated on the margin of the town and on the margin of society" (Lonien, 2009). In many ways, the Convent is the polar opposite of Ruby, a "liminal space where the monolithic categories of religion, race, class, and gender converge and make cultural hybridity possible." (Lonien, 2009). The convent is therefore a place where binaries fall apart. Life and death are not separate entities—Mavis keeps hearing and noticing her children growing up though they are dead. White and black, light-skinned, and dark-skinned did not mean anything to the women of the convent, where race is never mentioned and who form powerful, new identities from the ruins of their past life. The abjection they entered with is utter changed in the liminal space of the convent's grounds.

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