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**Historical Facts and Artistic Fiction in Toni Morrison's
Jazz (1992)**

Presented by:

Ms. Fatiha BOUTELDJA

Ms. Sara DJEKOUANE

Supervised by:

Ms. Fatiha BENSAFI

Board of Examiners :

Chair: Ms. Fatima ABDELLI, MAA, Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou.

Supervisor: Ms. Fatiha BESAFI, MAA. Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou.

Examiner: Ms. Mekioussa DJELLOUT, MAA, Mouloud Mammeri University of Tizi-Ouzou.

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The Master domiciliation laboratory:

This work is dedicated to:

My beloved parents
Who supported me along my studies
Whose affection and encouragement
Enabled me to finish this work
My lovely brothers and sisters
My lovely friends
My friend and co-researcher
`Sara

Fatiha

My lovely grand parents
My dear parents whose affection and
Encouragement enabled me to finish this work
My lovely brother and sister
My lovely aunts and my special friends
My friend and lovely co-researcher
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Abstract

The present dissertation has studied the Historical Facts and Artistic Fiction in Toni Morrison's Jazz (1992). Our major interest in this dissertation is to demonstrate the way the author resorts to historical facts in order to construct her fiction and how her literary imagination operates in recording the African American history and social issues. To achieve our purpose we have relied on Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism, which studies any given literary work in relation to the historical context in which it is produced; it also put emphasis on the cultural and social aspects of any historical text presented in a fictional way. We have divided our work into two chapters. The first has developed the main historical facts that Toni Morrison has used in order to make the world understand the history of the Afro-Americans easily. The second one has discussed the artistic fiction in Toni Morrison's Jazz, where we have examined her style of writing, the major narrative techniques she has relied on, and the important themes she tackled. We have provided a deep analysis of the main characters to shed light on the real experience and status of the African American people in the United States of America. Indeed, we have attempted to show how Toni Morrison built her fiction by using her own imagination and the way she has resorted to important historical events in the history of the African American people and real facts to reflect their troubling experience in the United States of America. At the end of this dissertation, we have come to conclude that Toni Morrison has resorted to real facts not only to trace or date the history of the Black Americans but she has used this kind of writhing to empower the Black American people and demonstrate the worth of the Afro-American literary artistry.

Key Words: *Arts-Fiction-History-Real Facts-Black Americans-Toni Morrison's Jazz.*

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I. Introduction

The history of the African Americans in the United States of America dates back to the discovery of the new world and the establishment of the thirteen colonies from 1607 to 1732. It began with the Transatlantic Slave Trade, from the 16th to the 19th centuries, when many 'Black' people were traded as slaves from Africa, which is their native continent, to the white men's New World, which is now America¹. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Afro-American people were taken by force to work under the laws of the white men and became slaves. They worked as servants in the crop fields under the supremacy of the white people; this is affirmed by Paul Levenjoy who states, "more than 7, 4 million of slaves were taken across the Atlantic Ocean from 1600 to 1800."² They were brought involuntarily, kidnapped and shipped in an inhuman manner.

During the same period, slavery was spread in America; it started when the first 'Indentured Servants' were brought to the British American colonies in 1619, mainly in the southern region of the country³. They were forced to work in the fields and harvests of cotton. Olaudah Equiano used to be a slave in the South of the United States of America. After his arrival to America in 1766, he claimed that "he was convinced that he has got into a world of bad spirits who would kill him, and when he looked around the ship, he saw large furnace or copper boiling and a multitude of black of every description chained together, every one of their countenance expressing sorrow and dejection."⁴ Indeed, African slaves were victims of all sorts of violence, racism and segregation; they were seen as inferior by the white men, and they have been subjected to all unimaginable horrors.

African slaves tried everything to escape slavery, violence, racism, segregation and discrimination. The most adequate solution was to leave the rural South and move to the North of the country in order to evade the harsh conditions of life and hope for safety and a better life. The history of the African Americans has been the concern of many Afro-American writers, like James Baldwin, Lawrence Paul Dunbar and Toni Morrison, who attempted to describe the African

American experience in the United States of America. Toni Morrison is an Afro-American writer, who in her narratives, intends to discuss different issues concerning black people and sheds light on their struggle and desire to live a decent life in America.

This is what one can find in her sixth novel *Jazz* (1992). In fact, the author tries to depict the real life, difficulties and tries to deal with their struggle and aspirations to affirm themselves as African American people who, must have the same rights as the whites. Toni Morrison records the different historical facts that the “Blacks” witnessed in the United States of America in order to examine the realities of the Afro-American people.

1. Review of the Literature

Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* received a large bulk of criticism; it has been a center attention of many scholars. In fact, her work reviewed from different perspectives. For instance, Jennifer Andrews, a professor in the department of English at the University of New Brunswick, states that: “*Jazz* is the subject of numerous, scholarly articles which explores a wide variety of topics including how Morrison uses Jazz music and its rhythms to shape her text.”⁵ Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* is a very interesting novel; it explores different themes, and Jazz music is used in a specific manner to shape the text of the narrative. Andrews asserts that “*Jazz* is Toni Morrison’s sixth novel and the second one of her great trilogy, which includes: *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992) and *Paradise* (1997), that gives description of the Afro-American history from the enslavement era onward.”⁶ However, She confirms that Toni Morrison’s sixth novel, *Jazz*, tackles the African Americans’ issues and makes reference to their history and presence in the United States of America.

Moreover, Rinaldo Walcott in his essay “Out of Kumbia: Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* and Pedagogical Answerability” relates Toni Morrison’s fiction to its European origins and compares it to Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. He claims :“if her novel *Jazz* is a rewriting of Scott Fitzgerald’s version of the Jazz Age, then this rewriting must occur by reference to a form that

originated in Europe and is (in the cited instance) a product of white Americans.”⁷This is to say that if Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* is a rewriting of Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, which is a European product, as a result Morrison’s narrative would be originated in Europe too. In this critique the idea is that, since Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* is a copy of Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* and the latter is a European product, so automatically *Jazz* will be a European product too but written by an African American author.

Finally, John Galm, another reviewer of Morrison’s work, believes that: “*Jazz* develops ‘a call and response’ technique that resembles a conversation, as well as Jazz music is an important basis in the black tradition.”⁸ the same point of view is shared by Anne Marry Paquet Deyris who states that: “[...] a call and response aspect is found in the narrative of *Jazz* because Jazz music is deeply woven into the themes of the novel.”⁹ So, it is clear from the two last critics that Toni Morrison uses the same structure of Jazz music, “call and response”, to build her fiction and intends to make reference to the importance of Jazz music in the African American culture.

2. Issue and Working Hypotheses

From the above review of the literature, we deduce that the aforementioned critics have dealt with different studies about Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* (1992). Each critic focuses on a specific aspect. However, not much attention is given to both Historical Facts and Artistic Fiction in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* (1992). We aim to add a new perspective where we are going to explore this theme. Our hypotheses aim to highlight the way Toni Morrison used real and historical facts to construct her fiction by using her own imagination in order to record the realities of the African American people and their anxiety. First of all, we intend to analyze the work from a historical perspective in relation to the story of *Jazz*, and then we are going to examine the novel from a literary perspective.

3. Methodological Outline

To reach our aim, we have divided the discussion of this research paper into two main chapters. The first one will deal with the historical facts in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, where we intend to focus on how Toni Morrison used history within the story and the most important historical events, which constructed the history of the African Americans in the United State. This chapter examines the Harlem Renaissance as an important era in the history of the African Americans and Great Migration and its causes as an important issue tackled in the novel, the 1917 East St- Louis Race riots, and the Roaring Twenties. The second chapter will shed light on the author's artistic and literary imagination in her narrative, where we intend to address the main narrative techniques that the author uses to construct her fiction. We will also discuss the main themes tackled by Toni Morrison in relation to the African Americans' tragic experience in the United States of America and provide a deep analysis for each character connected with the real status of the 'Black' people.

To deal with this issue, we will rely on Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism, as a theory, to examine deeply Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, and how did she construct her fiction from real historical events in a fictional literary work, in order to capture the realities of African Americans' history and community.

Endnotes

¹Fatiha, Barbar and Houria, Hassani Mebrouki. *Slavery in America: Origins Struggle and Resistance (1619-1865)*. Master Dissertation, Ahmed Draia University of Adrar, 2017, 19.

²Paul, Levenjoy. "Transformation in Africa". Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2000).

³Fatiha, Barbar and Houria, Hassani Mebrouki. *Slavery in America: Origins, Struggle and Resistance (1619-1865)*. " Master Dissertation, Ahmed Draia University of Adrar, 2017, 19.

⁴Mark Michael, Smith Stono. "Decommenting and Interpreting a Southern Slave Trade." Columbia: University of South Carolina, (2005).

⁵Jenifer, Andrews. "Reading Toni Morrison's *Jazz*: Rewriting of the Tall Tale and Playing with the Trickster in the White American and African- American Humor Traditions." *Canadian Review of American Studies*. (1999): 87-188.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Rinaldo, Walcott. "Out of Kumbla: Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and Pedagogical Answerability". *Cultural Studies* (1995), 325.

⁸John, Galm. *Jazz* "Encyclopedia of the Harlem". "Edited by Cary Wintz and Paul Finklemer". Routledge, (2004), 612.

⁹Anne Marie, Paquet Deyris. "Toni Morrison's *Jazz* and the City" *African- American Review* Vol, 35, Issue n°2. (2001), 219-231.

II. Methods and Materials

1. Methods

Theoretical Framework

This dissertation examines the issue of the Afro-American history presented in Toni Morrison's work entitled *Jazz* published in 1992. In order to achieve a succinct study, we will rely on Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism theory. In fact, our choice of focusing on this theory is to discover how Toni Morrison resorts to real historical facts to construct her fiction relying on the realities of the African American history and society. Indeed, New historicists consider works of literature as historical texts.

New Historicism

According to Merriam Webster's Dictionary, New Historicism is "a method of literary criticism that emphasizes the historicity of a text by relating it to its culture, society or ideology in a given time."¹⁰ In other words, the concern of New Historicism is based on the powerful relationships between historical, cultural text and the society that produced it in a specific period of time. In fact, New Historicism is first introduced by, the American literary historian and author, Stephen Greenblatt in 1980. For Stephen Greenblatt "New Historicism is a set of practices of cultural poetics, which is a type of literary analysis that aims to discover the original ideology behind significant historical and biological facts about the writer"¹¹. In the sense that, New Historicism purpose is to go beyond the life and experience of the authors in order to understand their texts and messages.

The first appearance of the concept of New Historicism is in the late 1970s and early 1980s; however, the latter did not receive much attention until the late 20th century, because at that time much importance was given to the literary works that focus on the voice of the marginalized people like the Afro-Americans. New Historicism approaches works of literature as historical texts; Toni Morrison's *Jazz* is a case in point. This theory is based on the idea that literature should be studied

and interpreted within the contexts of both the history of the author and the period when the literary work was written. One of Stephen Greenblatt's arguments is that "there is a real social world that gives a special form as well it influences the text it produces."¹² The idea is that, for New Historicism, there is a connection between the real social world and the literary created works.

New Historicism deals with the relationship between texts and the cultural system in which they are produced. In other words, the focus of this theory is to study any given historical period by taking into consideration the cultural context in which it is produced. New Historicists believe that: "[...] it makes no sense to separate literary texts from the real context around them because such texts are the product of complex social exchange or negotiation."¹³ in this quotation New Historicists explain that any given literary text which cannot be examined apart from its social context.

Thus, New Historicism focuses on the culturally specific literary text with the production of a specific historical period, while New Historicists view that history or reality as a mediation of linguistic codes, and literary works cannot be analyzed without going back to their historical background, culture and society where they are produced.

2. Materials

2.1 The Biography of the Author

Toni Morrison, born Chloe Anthony Wofford, is an African American writer. She was born on February 18th, 1931, in Lorain, Ohio in the United States of America, the second eldest daughter to George and Ramah Wofford.¹⁴ Her father worked as a welder and her mother was a domestic worker.

Morrison's childhood witnessed the period of the Great Depression of the 1930s. She grew up in an atmosphere filled with African American folklore and music. Her family was, as Morrison

states, “intimate with supernatural,”¹⁵ and influenced by myths, songs, visions and foreseeing the future.

Morrison loved reading books because of her parents who instilled in her the love of writing and reading. She preferred reading French, Russian, and English classical books including Jane Austen (1775-1817), Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) and Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910). Morrison was fascinated by their style and the way they depicted their experiences in their works. Thus, she was motivated to write in such way in her works, using her African American culture¹⁶.

In 1949, Morrison graduated from Lorain high school with honors and went to Howard University in Washington, where she studied English and Classical Literature. She graduated from Howard University with degree of Art in English in 1953, and continued her education in Cornell University where she got her Master’s degree in 1955. Then, she moved to Houston where she worked as a teacher in Texas Southern University.¹⁷

In 1957, Morrison worked as a teacher of English in Howard University. In 1964, she went to Syracuse, New York, where she worked as an editor for a Random House Company. In 1968, Morrison’s career as an editor flourished; she became the senior editor for Random House and was the only African American to hold that position. Toni Morrison published her first novel *The Bluest Eye* in 1970, her second novel *Sula* in 1973, and then *Song of Solomon* in 1977. In 1981, she produced her fourth novel, which is *Tar Baby*. A few years later, Toni Morrison published her great Trilogy that contains three novels which are: *Beloved* (1987), *Jazz* (1992), *Paradise* (1998); she also edited her narrative *Home* in 2012, and her last novel, *God Helps the Child*, in 2015. Morrison won several awards: The Pulitzer Prize in 1988, the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1993, a Medal for Distinguishing Contribution to American Letters from the National Book Foundation in 1993.¹⁸

On August 5th, 2019, Toni Morrison died at Montefiore Medical Center in New York City, from complications of pneumonia. She was 88 years old.¹⁹

2.2 The Summary of Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992)

Jazz is Toni Morrison's sixth novel published in 1992. It narrates the story of a couple named Violet and Joe Trace who are married over twenty years. The events of the narrative glide between the past and the present time and shift from the rural South in Virginia and the urban North. Joe and Violet meet in the South under walnut tree working in the cotton harvests. In 1906, the couple join the waves of the African Americans who migrate from the Southern region to the urban city in the North for the desire of better and descent life, to escape the harsh living conditions and violence that they face in the South.

However, the two migrants do not find the easy and safe life they imagined before migration. The couple does not gain the appropriate works and they are not paid enough as they hope. Violet works as an unlicensed hairdresser while her husband works as a cosmetics salesman. Things become worse between Violet and her husband because of Joe's betrayal with a young girl of eighteen years old. After a few months the teenage girl, named Dorcas, in her turn betrays her lover Joe with a younger man of her generation; this pushes Joe to commit a crime and he kills his teenage lover by shooting her at a party. Violet sinks into a great depression after she discovers the betrayal of her husband with another woman. She goes to the funeral of the dead girl and tries to destroy the face of her husband's lover Dorcas with a knife. After this illegal act, people call her "Violent" instead of "Violet Trace".

As a result, Violet starts a new adventure and attempts to imitate Dorcas in her way of dressing, hair-cut, make-up and even in the band of music she likes more. She also dates another man to make her husband jealous but the latter does not show any reaction as if love has frozen within him. This situation leads to realize that the personality of the dead girl is neither suitable to her age nor to her personality.

Endnotes

¹⁰*The Merriam, Webster Dictionary Poche*. 11th Ed. New York, (2019).

¹¹ Lakha, Nath Dakhal. *Revisiting History: African Experience in Toni Morrison's Novels*. Master Dissertation, Tribhuvan University of Nepal, 2012, 25.

¹²Ibid, 27.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Imane Hideyet, Belaid. *Beauty as a Cultural Aspect in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye*. Master Dissertation, University of Telemcen, (2016-2017), 15.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid, 16.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, 17.

III. Results

The present dissertation has studied the Historical Facts and Artistic Fiction in Toni Morrison's sixth novel, *Jazz* (1992). Our major interest in this work is to demonstrate the way the author resorts to historical facts in order to construct her narrative and how her literary imagination operates in recording the African American history and social matters.

In order to achieve a succinct study, we have relied on Stephen Greenblatt's New Historicism as a theoretical tool to analyze Toni Morrison's *Jazz*. The use of New Historicism as a theory is relevant in our research, since Toni Morrison's narrative is considered as a historical novel, where the author uses the most important historical events and realities in the history of the African Americans in the United States of America to construct her novel. However, this theory considers works of literature as historical texts and makes reference to the cultural context in which they are produced. We have also observed that Toni Morrison has focused on the social aspects of the black American community by stressing on the importance and the worth of their culture, society and history in the United States of America.

In the first chapter of this dissertation, we have studied the history of the Black Americans within the story of *Jazz* and singled out the most important historical events that Toni Morrison has mentioned in her novel. We have come to the conclusion that Toni Morrison resorts to real historical facts, not only to trace or date the most important events in the history of her nation, but also to demonstrate their troubling experience in which they were victims of violence, segregation and racism, while they were struggling for their identity and civil rights.

In the second chapter, we have examined the way Toni Morrison resorts to real facts to build her fiction and analyzed the major narrative techniques she uses as well as the main themes she discusses. Also, we have provided a deep analysis of the characters of the novel. We have come to the conclusion that Toni Morrison writes in a solid and practical way. In her narrative structure, she places the Whites as superiors and the Blacks as inferiors, who are considered as the

“others” in the American society- a society where the question of race is still unanswered. Toni Morrison writes specifically in a fictional way and her novel is considered to be an artistic work where she represents the African American culture as well as society. Toni Morrison attempts to capture the real life of the African Americans in a specific lens by using history to form her fiction. Indeed, the author intends to shed light on the importance of the African American history in order to show that the latter is a major part of the American history.

Finally, we have deduced that Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* (1992) is a fictional literary work, where the author uses her own imagination in recording the African Americans’ realities and social issues. The narrative captures and reimagines historical and cultural moments and gives importance to the African Americans’ denied history. Toni Morrison aims also to empower the Black American people and display the worth of the Afro-American literary artistry. Thus, she wants to tell the readers what really happened because the real history of the Blacks was misinterpreted or denied by the White Americans. She wants also to affirm the African American culture, society and identity.

IV. Discussion

Chapter One: Historical Facts in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992)

African American literature reflects the most important issues that faced the Blacks in the United States of America. Black authors, like Toni Morrison, have used literature to express their ideas, empower their culture and depict historical events in his/her literary works seeking to get attention of the readers to the matters that they want to solve. In dealing with Toni Morrison's sixth narrative, we have noticed that *Jazz* is a historical novel, written in a fictional way. Morrison focused on the most important historical events that influenced the history of the Black Americans.

In this chapter, we are going to tackle two main subjects. The first one analyzes the history of the Black Americans within the story of *Jazz*, while the second examines the important historical events mentioned in Toni Morrison's narrative.

History within the Story

In this part of the first chapter, we are going to examine the way the African American author, Toni Morrison, has used history or historical events in her narrative, *Jazz*. Indeed, through her own imagination and literary work, she wanted to make the world understand and know the history of her nation by tracing and dating the most important historical events that constructed the history of the Afro-Americans. Toni Morrison also aimed to capture the real traumatic experience that the Blacks have witnessed in the United States of America by telling the readers of her narrative what has really happened at that time, because of the fact that the real Afro-American history was misinterpreted by the Whites in particular and the whole world in general. Thus, Toni Morrison in her narrative writes about history, culture and society, in order to affirm that and empower the Blacks by displaying the value of the African Americans' literature and arts.

In dealing with Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, we have deduced that she has mentioned four important historical events that played great role in the construction of the history of her nation;

which are the Great Migration, the Race Riots in East St. Louis, the Harlem Renaissance and the Roaring Twenties.

New Historicism can be applied in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, since this theory considers works of literature as a social and cultural constructs in which Toni Morrison has created her work. Besides, *Jazz* reflects the social and the cultural aspects and circumstances of the African Americans. In fact, Toni Morrison deals with the marginalized people who are the African Americans and it is clear that most of the characters she creates, Violet, Joe, Dorcas, and Alice Manfred, are Blacks and of course they *face* all sorts of violence, racism and segregation; therefore, she feels sympathy towards them. New Historicists also stress her sympathy towards the ignorant and marginalized Black Americans. To sustain this argument, the American author Kelley Griffith states in his book *The American Version of Cultural Studies*: "New Historicism shows its sympathy for disadvantaged marginalized people."²⁰

1.The Great Migration (1916-1970)

The Great Migration is the relocation of more than six million African Americans from the rural South to the cities of the North, which started from 1916 to 1970. Driven from their homes due to the lack of economic opportunities and segregation, many Black Americans headed North searching to build a new place for themselves as well as looking for economic, political and social opportunities to create their own culture.²¹

The aim of the Migrants is to escape the harsh conditions that they lived in the South such as violence, racism and segregation; however, the Blacks were forced to work as slaves in cotton fields, which were cheap labors for that they gained low wages. In fact, these social and financial issues are due to many facts: first, Practices of Jim Crow Laws that are the laws imposed by the white men restored across the South in the 1870s just after the Civil War and the Reconstruction Era.²² Jim Crow Laws contain social customs, which put into consideration racial segregation.

From 1881 to 1964, these laws separated Black Americans from White Americans in 26 states, Delaware to California and from North Dakota to Texas.²³ Second, Black Codes which are designed to limit the Afro-Americans' freedom especially the sharecropping system which offered little in the way of economic opportunities.²⁴ Third, the spread of Ku Klux Klan which is a single organization whose members are related together by common dedication to preserve White Supremacy; they advocated and promoted economic and political domination of the Whites.²⁵ In fact, the Ku Klux Klan caused the intimidation, violence and even the hanging of the African Americans. Finally, the most serious cause was the Race Riots of 1917, which lasted 13 days and left damages on the black Americans.

Toni Morrison makes reference to this event in her novel *Jazz* (1992), as it is exemplified by Joe and Violet Trace who joined the first waves of African Americans during the Great Migration. As many of the Afro-Americans, the Traces worked in the cotton fields in the Southern region of the United States of America, under the supremacy of the White Americans from their young age. Looking for freedom, better ways of living and feeling more secure, the Traces decided to escape the harsh conditions of life in the South by moving to the urban North.

Toni Morrison in this narrative deals with the feeling of freedom which is expressed by the couple Joe and Violet Trace. The latter takes the train like many other African Americans and moves to the urban areas in the North. This can be illustrated from the novel as it follows:

Joe stood up, his fingers clutching the baggage rack above his head. He left the dancing better that way and told Violet to do the same. They were hanging there, a young country couple laughing and tapping back at the track.²⁶

The narrator wants to demonstrate that Joe and Violet, as well as the other Black passengers on the train, spend most of their time being anxious. However, once the train approaches the destination, which is the city of New York, the feeling of hope and freedom starts to come to their minds and the couple imagines the shacking of the train tracks as a music to dance in the way to their new life. In a critical observation of how people arrived in the city, the narrator states:

Some were slow about it and travelled from Georgia to Illinois, to the city back to Georgia out to San Diego and finally sharing their heads, surrender themselves to the end no other. They came for a visit and forgot to go back to tall cotton or short.²⁷

Furthermore, in the novel, many characters did not find the life they want in the city. The couple did not take into consideration the problems and the challenges they would face in the urban North. In this regard, Deborah H. Branes, who is a student in Howard University, where she is specialized in literature of Black women writers and authored a dissertation on the works of Toni Morrison, explains:

We are told for example, that the once-happy Joe and Violet Trace begin their descent into marital discord after succession of ameliorative moves that take further and further from their cultural roots like so many other real-life (and fictional) African Americans, the Traces reify the ambitions of the rural black who believed that the urban North was the promised land of opportunity, equality and plenty [...] Accordingly, in this and other novels Morrison portrays culture shock as traumatic, yet inevitable consequence for upwardly mobile, migrating or rootless blacks.²⁸

Joe and Violet left their County, Vesper in Virginia, in 1906, because of their sad and dispossessed past, they went to the North trying to leave their past behind them and start a new life full of hope. As the narrator says: “the wave of the black people running from want and violence crested in the 1870s; the 80s; the 90s but was steady stream in 1906 when Joe and Violet joined it.”²⁹ Finally, they arrived to Harlem (New York), the Promised Land for the waves of Black people like them.

1.The Race Riots in East ST. Louis (1917)

The 1917 East St Louis riots is another important event that Toni Morrison makes reference to in her novel Jazz. In New Historicism, a literary work cannot be analyzed apart from its history. The concern of New Historicism is to focus on the relationship between any given literary work and its cultural system in which it is produced.³⁰ In fact, Toni Morrison in her novel makes reference to the July 1917 East St Louis, this event includes music as a means for the Black people to contest and fight for their civil rights. The Race Riots represent the African American culture, since they are considered as a means to express their needs and wants.

Alice Manfred stood for three hours on Fifth Avenue wondering at the cold black faces and listening to drums saying what the graceful women and the marching men could not[...] It was July 1917 and the beautiful faces were cold and quiet; moving slowly into the space the drums were building for them.³¹

In other words, Toni Morrison uses the character Alice Manfred as a witness of the silent march of 1917, which is known as the first mass protest organized by the African Americans. On July 1917, ten thousand people marched to protest the lynching and the police treatment of black people across the Southern states. The march was precisely held as a reaction to the violent riots in East St Louis, where the Whites killed Black people including Dorcas' parents, and burned down their houses. Since this was a silent protest, the only sound to accompany it was the beat of the drums. Alice thinks that "the drums are transporting what the graceful women and the marching men could not."³² As it is mentioned above, music has been used throughout African American history as a tool for protest, and even though the drums on Fifth Avenue do not make Blues or Jazz music, they have a strong feeling of connection in Alice. In Morrison's words:

They suddenly, like a rope cast for rescue, the drums spanned the distance, gathering them all up and connecting them; Alice, Dorcas, her sister and brother-in law, the boy Scout and the frozen black forces, the watchers on the pavement and those in the windows above.³³

Alice finds consolation in the faces of the Black protesters and the drums put it all in focus for her; they are all combatting for their rights and freedom; as, they are all gathered to fight against the violent riots.

In addition, through our examination of the novel, Toni Morrison deals with two main causes of the 1917 East St. Louis Riots. The first is that Black veterans of the First World War started the riots, and the narrator begins the explanation with a collective, anonymous phrase, and it is exemplified in the novel when the narrator says:

Some said rioters were disgruntled veterans who had fought in all-colored units, were refused the service of the Young Men's Christian Association, over there and over here, and came home to white violence more intense than when they enlisted and, unlike the battles they fought in Europe, stateside fighting was pitiless and totally without honor.³⁴

The above quotation shows that the Black veterans of the First World War started the riots, and that they had risked their lives for their country. In fact, this passage is presented in a third person narrator, so that the narrator's voice combines with that of the Black veterans, as well as with those in the Black community who believe the veterans started the riots. Furthermore, "some" in this quotation shows that if the Black veterans did start the riots, various people within the Black community believe they did so because of a lack of power and respect. Therefore, the narrator's voice combines and clashes with various groups within the Black community like the veterans, workers and their white dominants.

The second cause is that the white people in the North started the riots because they were afraid that the Black Migration would trouble their lives. Indeed, the White Americans who lived in the Northern cities were afraid of losing their domination and power, which is the point that is demonstrated in this passage: "Others said (the rioters) were whites terrified by the wave of the southern Negroes flooding the towns searching for work and a place to live."³⁵ It is clear that the northern whites caused the Riots, for fear that they were being in competition with too many Black Americans. In this passage, Toni Morrison shows that the Whites are afraid, thinking that they are losing their jobs and housing and that the City in general is changing considerably because of the presence of the African Americans.

3. The Harlem Renaissance (1920)

The Harlem Renaissance is an African American artistic and intellectual movement that flourished in the 1920s. It also marked a cultural period during the 1920s when the African Americans celebrated their heritage through music, art, literature and politics. In addition, the Harlem Renaissance is an important historical moment that Toni Morrison scrutinizes in her novel *Jazz*. Soumia Benazouz in her dissertation, "The African Americans and Quest for Identity", asserts:

Jean Tomer, Rudolf Fisher, Wallace Thurman and Claude McKay are among the authors who marked this movement and defended the African American culture, traditions and civil rights. Following the Civil War, a large number of African Americans moved to the North and they found Harlem, a City in New York, as a suitable place to live in. This period occurred just after the Great Migration when millions of African Americans migrated to the large Northern cities in search for safety, economic opportunities and freedom³⁶.

The Harlem Renaissance was also called the “New Negro Movement.”³⁷ In fact, African American authors, artists, poets, and intellectuals found new ways to express their pride for their culture. Thus, the Afro-Americans found that Harlem Renaissance as a suitable concept to take their rightful place in society and contribute to their culture in significant ways that the time had come for them. Nevertheless, the movement reached its highest point in the late 1920s, and its influence continued until the 1930s and beyond.

In her novel *Jazz*, Toni Morrison’s main characters, Joe and Violet Trace, migrated to the City of Harlem (New York) hoping for a better way of living, such as good job, better housing...etc. Indeed, Toni Morrison in one of her interviews says that her purpose in *Jazz* is “to tell a very simple story about people who do not know that they are living in Jazz age and to never use the word.”³⁸ That is to say, Toni Morrison wants to transmit her message easily and indirectly about the people who were living in the Jazz Age without knowing that they were living in that period. In fact, in the narrative, the Harlem Renaissance represents an important era of the 1920s, since Harlem is seen as a place of a great importance for the migrants and a promised land during the Twenties. Toni Morrison in her novel *Jazz* describes Harlem as a free place where there is no Whites’ control, as it is a beautiful location in America and the world in the twentieth century. In this regard, the American author of Harlem Renaissance Gilbert Osofsky states:

Prior to World War One, the neighborhood was already the largest colony of the colored people, in similar limits, in the world and it continued to expand. By 1920 this section of Harlem bordered approximately by one hundred and Thirtieth streets on the South. One hundred and forty-fifth streets on the North and West of Fifth to Eighth Avenue was predominately Negro and inhabited by some 73,000 people.³⁹

Gilbert Osofsky wants to say that Harlem is the biggest and strongest community in North America with its strongest dimension, and that it has been inhabited by most of the Afro-Americans especially during the 1920s. Furthermore, he remarks that Harlem is a unique among the various urban areas that the Black Americans migrated to, not only because of its population numbers but also because it is a respectable, elegant place to live in. Harlem is a perfect place in New York to live in. No doubt, these physical surroundings help to anticipate the feeling of Black pride and historical momentousness that come to be associated with the Harlem Renaissance.

Therefore, Toni Morrison's *Jazz* plays an important role in the reconstruction of the history of the Afro-American people because Toni Morrison is considered as one of the authors who brought to the modern readers the realities about the Black American history. During the Harlem Renaissance, Afro-Americans start to have access to some fields of life such as economy, education and social opportunities that had previously been denied to them.

In *Jazz*, characters like Violet, Joe Trace, Dorcas and Alice Manfred are haunted by their past. Violet is obsessed by her mother's suicide. Likewise, Joe meditates on his unsuccessful attempts to have Wild, his stepmother, who acknowledges him as her son. Dorcas's psychological state has worsened because of the traumatic memories of her parents' death. Alice has faced the power of her repressed feeling about her husband's infidelity over thirty years. Toni Morrison supports the idea that history has not an end, and a conscious historical connection is absolutely necessary for the psychological well-being of the individual and community. In reality, this connection is important because of the historical era in which *Jazz* is set. This is a time of massive migration from South to North with the new image of the black individuality. In *Jazz*, Joe declares himself as a "New Negro". The New Negro means someone who is confident or self-assured and who has freed himself from white people to define his life and aims. The Harlem Renaissance might also be seen as a time breaking when "newness" became a culturally dominant aspect that marked not only progress but also trauma. James Weldon Johnson, who is an American writer and

civil rights activist; he worked in 1917 as a leader of the National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People. He suggests that the problematic metaphor of “the New Negro” offered a limited and unstable model of assertive manhood, he explains:

Whatever promise the new man has for the future, his name and the necessity for his creation imply some inadequacy in the past. Like the New Year’s resolution or the “turning over new leaf”, the debate of the New Negro announced a dissatisfaction with the Old Negro. And since the New/Old dichotomy is a mere convenience of mind- Afro-Americans were really so- called Old Negro was merely carried within the bosom of the New as a kind of self-doubt, perhaps self-hate.⁴⁰

James Weldon Johnson in this quotation wants to highlight the negative aspects of the Harlem Renaissance. Even though the Black people were somehow free, but they were not released from inferiority complex. They were still working under the control of white people and they did not have the same rights.

Historical memory movement, which is to move away from the past, is considered as the symbol that governs modern views of the Harlem Renaissance, and this historical memory is spotlighted in Toni Morrison’s novel. In *Jazz*, both of the two main characters Joe and Violet Trace in the novel have a desire to make a link with their past. They try to live with it in order to be able to face their trauma and problems, that they have endured in the South and be able to live a new life in the North without being afraid of the future.

In the novel, we have noticed that Harlem is a new place for Joe. He cannot even tell his friends Giston and Stuck, his near brother Victory, things he would easily have said about his boyhood. Due to his horrible and painful past, he is not able to speak even to his friends what he has experienced during his childhood. For example, in the narrative, he says “I changed once too often. Made myself new one time too many. You could say I have been a New Negro all my life.”⁴¹ For Joe, this new life is like a problem that brings pain. Thus, he feels the need to tell all his unspoken dreams and memories. Unfortunately, Violet cannot fulfill this role, so Joe puts his

neediness on an eighteen-year self-absorbed young woman named Dorcas, who reminds him of Wild, who perhaps is his mother. Since Joe was given up by his mother the day he was born.

4. The Roaring Twenties (1920)

The Roaring Twenties is the last point that is going to be discussed in this chapter and that Toni Morrison makes reference to in her novel *Jazz*. Before we analyze this important historical event according to the novel, we have to give it a short definition. The Roaring Twenties, also known as the 1920s, were years when America witnessed great changes and broke with the First World War (1914-1918), as it assisted in the birth of a modern national lifestyle. In fact, this epoch is characterized with what is called the ‘flappers’. The latter is associated with the women who freed themselves from the conservative ways of living, which means that women at that time advocated short dresses, short hairstyles, listened to jazz music and challenged the previously accepted customs and traditions of society. Furthermore, this period witnessed an economic growth; more Americans lived in cities than on farms and the nation’s total wealth doubled between 1920 and 1929.

Indeed, the Roaring Twenties is examined by Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*, which can be noticed in the character Dorcas. As a teenager, Dorcas begins to break away from her aunt’s old-fashioned way of living and adopts a new fashion that suits her personality. Moreover, she wants to be desired by men and be more attractive and admired: “Dorcas dances well- not as fast as some others, but she is graceful in spite of those shaming shoes, and she is provocative.”⁴² This quotation shows that even if Dorcas wears bad shoes, but with her way of dancing, she attracts many men. Alice Manfred, Dorcas’s aunt, is a conservative and authoritarian woman, when Dorcas was a child; she has been raised by her in a good but oppressive way by transmitting her good manners and education. However, Dorcas tries to break with all what has been transmitted by her aunt. Toni Morrison observes:

Sneaking out to that party with her best friend, Felice, ought to have been hard to arrange, but Alice Manfred had overnight business in spring-field, and nothing could have been easier. The only difficulty was in finding something foxy enough to wear.⁴³

Dorcas is trying to go to the night party in secret, and she takes the absence of her aunt, who works at night in spring-field, as a good opportunity to go out with her friend Felice. As a result, Dorcas disobeys her aunt by adopting the new fashion and way of life.

To conclude, this chapter has discussed the most important historical events mentioned in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, where we examined the way Toni Morrison resorts to historical events to build her narrative. In this part, we have examined the four important events that Toni Morrison develops in her novel, which are: the Great Migration (1916-1970), the East St. Louis Riots (1917), the Harlem Renaissance (1920) and the Roaring Twenties (1920). In fact, this novel expresses the traumatic experience and misery that the African Americans have been through such as racism, violence, segregation and the lack of economic opportunities. Because of these social issues, the African Americans decided to leave the South and go to the North. We have also dealt with the July 1917 East St Louis Riots where music was used as a form of expression for their needs and wants. In fact, Jazz music is used in this narrative to show the complexity of African American life in the early twentieth century.

Moreover, the 1917 East St. Louis Riots, according to Toni Morrison, have two main causes. The first cause is that the Black veterans of the First World War caused the riots to fight for their country. The second one is that the Northern Whites set off the riots because they were afraid of losing their power and domination due to the New Migrants. The third event is the Harlem Renaissance. Harlem in the narrative refers to a unique place for the characters where they can find better ways of living. The Roaring Twenties is the last historical event that we have examined in our chapter. In fact, this period is more illustrated by the character of Dorcas who has been raised by her aunt, Alice Manfred, in an oppressive way by following a conservative way of life.

However, Dorcas tries to break these conservative behaviors by adopting new lifestyle that suits more her personality.

Endnotes

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²¹ History. Com. Editors. "The Great Migrants". March 4, 2010.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶ Toni, Morrison. *Jazz*. (New York: Vintage, 1992), 30.

²⁷Ibid.

²⁸ Deborah, H. Branes. "Moving on up: the Madness of Migration in Toni Morrison's Fiction: Contemporary Criticism". Ed. David Middleton. New York: Garland Publishing, 2000, 283-296. cited in Lakha, Nath Dakhal. *Revisiting History: African Experience in Toni Morrison's Novels*. Master Dissertation, Tribhuvan University of Nepal, 2012, 140.

²⁹ Toni, Morrison. *Jazz*. (New York: Vintage, 1992), 30.

³⁰ Lakha, Nath Dakhal. *Revisiting History: African Experience in Toni Morrison's Novels*. Master Dissertation, Tribhuvan University of Nepal, 2012, 25.

³¹ Toni, Morrison. *Jazz*. (New York: Vintage, 1992), 33.

³²Ibid, 53.

³³ Ibid, 50.

³⁴Ibid, 57.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Soumia, Benazouz. *The African Americans and the Quest for Identity*. Master Dissertation, Abdelhamid Ibn Badis University of Mostaganem, 2018, 30.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Toma, Le Claire. "Interview with Toni, Morrison: Art of Fiction", 117.

³⁹Gilbert, Osofsky. *Harlem: the Making of Ghetto* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 115.

⁴⁰James, Weldon Johnson. *Black Manhattan* (New York: Da Capo, 1991), 280.

⁴¹Toni, Morrison. *Jazz*. (New York: Vintage, 1992), 64.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid, 59.

Chapter Two: Artistic Fiction in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

History has witnessed many written works, which intertwined literature and civilization, though they are considered by some critics as two different and separated fields. One of these works is *Jazz* by Toni Morrison. The latter aims to discuss some important historical events deeply and writes about a specific era in the African American life, as she states in the foreword of her novel, *Jazz* : “I was interested in rendering a period in African American life through a specific lens.”⁴⁴ In order to construct her fiction by using her own imagination and art. One of the most important characteristics of her fictional work is the fact that she builds her narrative in a way that the experience of her novel's characters reflects the African Americans' real experience and status in the United States of America. Commenting on Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, Professor Sture Allen argues: “In her depiction of the world of the black people, in life as legend, Toni Morrison has given the Afro-American people their history back, piece by piece.”⁴⁵

It is worth noting that Toni Morrison never wrote the history of her life; however, she wrote mainly about the history of her nation. As Mail Marques De Azevedo, who is a professor at the Federal University of Parana in Brazil, claims: “Toni Morrison argues the authenticity of her presence in the series of talks about life writing is the connection of her literary heritage with slave narratives- the autobiographical narratives of Black slaves or ex-slaves.”⁴⁶ This means that Toni Morrison does not only trace or date the historical facts, but she uses this kind of writing to empower the Black American people and demonstrate the worth of the Afro-American literary artistry. In this regard, Marques Mail adds, “Toni Morrison's art aims at the racial memory of her people.”⁴⁷ In other words, Toni Morrison's reliance on her imagination and her depiction of real facts in a fictional representation intends to make the world understand easily the history of the African Americans and their real experiences.

In this chapter, we are going to highlight the way Toni Morrison resorts to real facts to build her fiction, and examine the major narrative techniques she uses and the important themes she discusses. Also, we are going to provide a deep analysis of the main characters of the novel.

1. The Narrative Techniques Used in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

Toni Morrison in her novel writes about historical, social, and cultural matters in which the urban and the real life of Black Americans is represented in a fictional work. In order to analyze the strategy that Morrison utilizes, we notice that the writer uses a unique and special style of writing which attracts us and pushes us to examine the major narrative techniques she uses to build her narrative.

Toni Morrison has inspired and borrowed the plot of her novel from the photographer's James Van Der Zee's book, *the Harlem Book of the Dead* (1978), which tells the story of a dead girl who was shot by her lover in a party. As Toni Morrison states: "Seeing a photograph of a pretty girl in a coffin and reading a photographer's recollection of how she got there."⁴⁸ Toni Morrison reveals the basic plot of her novel in the first page of her book, which is an unusual technique in literature; it can be seen as the starting point of Toni Morrison's novel, which is mainly about the life of those people touched by the dead girl, Dorcas. From our previous knowledge, a plot can be either a simple plot, which contains a rising action, a climax, and a falling action, following a chronological order, or it can be a complex plot which does not follow a chronological order, making reference to the past through the use of flashbacks, then it comes back to follow the present events. Consequently, we can say that the plot of Toni Morrison's *Jazz* is a complex plot, because it does not contain any rising action, or climax or falling action.

From our close reading of the novel, we notice that the narrator makes reference to the past by flashbacks and memories of the characters. It is noticeable when Dorcas meets Joe in Malvonne's apartment; she remembers when her mother slapped her on her face: "Maybe her nothing was worse since she knew her mother, and had even been slapped in her face by her for

some sass she couldn't remember. But she did remember and has told him so, about the slap across her face."⁴⁹ Then, the narrator returns to the present time and continues to tell us the rest of the events in the present moment when she cries again and Joe holds her close. As it is well illustrated in the novel: "The Iroquois sky passes the windows and if they do see it, it crayon-colors their love."⁵⁰

Stream of consciousness is one of the narrative techniques used by Toni Morrison in her narrative. According to the psychologist William James "this technique is reserved for indicating an approach to the presentation of psychological aspects of characters as an unconnected and disorganized flow of thoughts, ideas and feelings"⁵¹, as it is the case of Violet when she thinks about Joe and Dorcas' affair:

What did she see, young girl like that, barely out of high school, with unbraided hair, lip rouge for the first time and high heeled shoes? And what did he? A young me with high-yellow skin instead of black? A young me with long wavy hair instead of short? Or a not me at all. A me he was loving in Virginia because that girl Dorcas wasn't around there anywhere was that it? Who was it? Who was he thinking of when he run in the dark to meet me in the cane field? Some-body golden, like my own golden boy, who I never ever saw but who tore up my girl as surely as if we'd being the best of lovers? Help me god, help me if that was it because I knew and loved him better than anybody except True Belle who is the one made me crazy about him in the first place. Is that what happened.⁵²

Toni Morrison also uses inner monologue, which refers to the characters' inner voice; it is when one can hear himself talking in his head without actually speaking or forming sounds. This technique helps the characters to express their thoughts, ideas and feelings without speaking aloud; this is noticeable in the passage when Violet talked to herself by saying: "Violet is me! The me that hauled hay in Virginia and handled a four-mule in the brace, I have stood in a cane field in the middle of night when the sound of it rustling hid the slither of the snakes and I stood still waiting for him."⁵³ In addition, when reading the novel, we notice that Toni Morrison uses different voices to tell her story. The first narrator is an unknown one; we do not even know if he is a man or a woman, a white or a black person. The American literary critic and professor Henry Louis Gates

Jr. sustains this idea in one of his interviews about *Jazz*: “the multiple and self-contradictory omniscient narrative voices are undetermined, it is either a male or a female, neither a young nor an old, neither rich nor poor.”⁵⁴ In an interview of Angeles Carabi with Toni Morrison, she answers and explains her choice of narrator by stating that: “the voice is a voice of a talking book [...] I deliberately restricted myself using an “ I “ that was only connected to an artifact of the book [...] As though the book talking, writing itself in a sense.”⁵⁵ This means that Toni Morrison does not use a clear voice or an actual person within the novel, but she wants to leave the floor to the reader to finish reading the novel, and discover who the narrator is. Indeed, Lyn Neary, in an interview with Toni Morrison, declares that the latter “does not want her reader to get any comfort in knowing the personality of the narrator is a man or a woman, Black or White or a person at all.”⁵⁶

Keeping the narrator ambiguous and unknown is done in order to push the reader to read the novel deeply and look for the teller of the story in each sentence of the novel. As a result, it is clear that the narrator is omniscient. An omniscient narrator refers to a person who has knowledge of everything in the novel. Even though he is unknown, he entirely captures the real life of the characters, describes them and gives us, as readers, more information about them and transmits their feeling and thoughts. In this regard, the narrator states, “I watched everything and everyone and tried to figure out their plans, their reasoning, long before they do.”⁵⁷ In addition, Toni Morrison uses another narrator’s voice which is the voice of all the characters, where each one of them takes a speech to tell a part of the story, his own story. This is exemplified through Joe when he takes the speech and tells us about his first meeting with his teenage lover Dorcas, he states:

All I know I saw her buying candy and the whole thing was sweet. Not just, candy the whole thing and picture of it. Candy is something you lick, suck on, and then swallow and it is gone. No. This was something else. More like blue water and white flowers, and sugar in the air. I needed to be there, where it was all mixed up together just right, and where that was, was Dorcas.⁵⁸

In this sense, Toni Morrison resorts to the voice of the characters and gives each one of them a chance to tell his own perception of the story and justify his illegal and bad deeds. Although the characters have committed illegal and brutal acts, Morrison tries to make the reader empathize with them and avoid value judgments. This can be explained by the fact that all human beings are prone to make such mistake and they are born with imperfections.

While reading Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, we observe that the content of the novel has something to do with Jazz music starting with the name of the novel. The choice of the title is made in order to make reference to the importance of this kind of music in the African American culture. In fact, "Jazz develops a "call and response" technique that resembled a conversation."⁵⁹ It is a compositional technique usually used in jazz music, it resembles a conversation: the call is a phrase of music, answered by other different phrases. As an illustration of call and response used in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, Violet states:

Plenty of time, I have carried the welt given me by a two-tone peckerwood because I was late in the field row the next morning. Plenty time, plenty, I chopped twice the wood that was needed into short leg and kind line to make sure the crackers had enough and would not go hollering for me when I was bound to meet my Joe Trace.⁶⁰

In this regard, we may say that this kind of sentences give more beauty, value and uniqueness to her narrative, and the use of this technique as a structure constructs her novel. Toni Morrison intends to make reference to the importance of Jazz music in the African American culture and gives more value to the Afro- American literature.

2. Characterization in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

Toni Morrison created the characters of her novel in order to make the world understand the physical and the psychological trauma of the African Americans in the United States of America. Through her novel, she captures the sufferings, bad experiences, and the desire for safety and a better life. In this part of our research paper, we are going to focus on the major characters of the novel, who are mainly Violet, Joe and Dorcas.

A-Violet Trace:

Violet is described as a skinny and dark skinned woman of fifty years old. She works as an unlicensed hairdresser and seems to be worn down by life's difficulties. She also seems to suffer from obsession, depression and loneliness. This suffering is caused by the fact that she is far from her family in the South. Indeed, the important thing she gets out is "never and never have children whatever happened, no small foot would rest on another while a hungry mouth said: "Mama?"⁶¹ Even Joe is not ready to have children because he thinks that: "city life would have been better without them."⁶²

Being alone, Violet regrets the decision to not have children. Her husband's betrayal with Dorcas worsens their relationship. This makes her a silent and lonely woman in her marriage, as she enters a difficult psychological state. Violet's fear to lose Joe is due to her father's abandonment of the family, which caused the suicide of her mother. It was a bad tragic experience for Violet, who enters in a great depression.

Because of Joe's betrayal, Violet commits a violent act by destroying the face of her husband's lover, Dorcas, with a knife. Alice Manfred who is Dorcas's aunt states:

She didn't need the name to be afraid or to know who she was: the stars of her niece's funeral. The woman who ruined the service, changed the whole point and meaning of it and was practically all anybody talked about when they talked about Dorcas's death and in the process had changed the woman's name.⁶³

The feeling of a betrayed woman rises Violet's curiosity and instigates her to know about the dead girl. She tries to imitate her in her way of dressing and dancing, even in the band of music Dorcas likes. Violet also starts to date another young man to make Joe jealous; however, the man she dates runs away because of her age and outfit. This act led Violet to realize that Dorcas's personality is not suitable to her age.

B- Joe Trace:

Joe Trace is Violet's husband; he was born and raised in Vesper in Virginia, in a little place called Vienna, in 1873.⁶⁴ Joe is portrayed as a simple and kind man. He is an orphan and adopted by the Williams, Rod and Frank. He gives himself the Trace's last name because as Rod Williams told him his parents disappeared without "Trace". Joe has met his wife Violet in the cotton harvests in the South and they get married. The couple has joined the waves of the migrants and moved to the urban North for the desire of a better life, where Joe Trace works as cosmetics salesman. Joe also suffers from loneliness because of Violet's silence; overtime her silence annoys her husband then puzzles him and finally presses him. He is married to a woman who speaks to her birds.⁶⁵ Perhaps this is the reason of his betrayal with a teenaged girl of eighteen years old. Dorcas, Joe's lover, in her turn has also betrayed him with a young man. This pushes him to shoot her at the night party. After this heinous act, Joe Trace enters in a great depression and suffers from regret and loneliness.

C- Dorcas:

Dorcas is portrayed as a pretty teenaged girl. She is adopted by her aunt Alice Manfred, after her parents' death, who were killed in the riots. These Riots took place in East St. Louis on July 1917 and many Whites were killed.⁶⁶ The reason of these riots as some said:

The rioters were disgruntled veterans who had fought in all colored units, were refused the services of the YMCA, over there and over here, and came home to white violence more intense than when they enlisted and, unlike the battles they fought in Europe, stateside fighting was pitiless and totally without honor. Others said that they were whites terrified by the wave of southern Negroes flooding town.⁶⁷

The aunt wants to raise her niece Dorcas in a strict and oppressive way. She protects her from everything, "she worries about how to keep the heart ignorant of the hips and the head in charge of both."⁶⁸ But resisting her aunt's protection and restraining hands, "Dorcas thought of the life

below the rash as all the life there was.”⁶⁹ Dorcas has been drawn with jazz music and dancing, two things that her Aunt Alice hates, as she states:

It was the music. The dirty, get- on- down music the women sang, the men played, and both danced to, close and shameless or apart and wild. Alice was convinced and so were the Miller sisters as they blew into cups of Postum in the kitchen. It made you to unwise disorderly. Just hearing it was like violating the law.⁷⁰

Alice Manfred claims that Jazz was not real music, it was just colored flock’s stuff, harmful, and not real not serious.⁷¹ At the age of eighteen, Dorcas falls in love with an old married man, Joe, and she might have thought he could take the place of her dead father for a moment, and perhaps considers him as an escape from the protection of her aunt. A few months later, Dorcas betrays Joe with a younger man of her generation, and this was the cause of her tragic end and the depression of Joe after shooting her at the party.

Finally, throughout the creation of the characters of the novel, Toni Morrison wants to capture and depict the traumatic experience of the Afro-Americans in the United States of America. We notice that most of her characters are Blacks who suffer from a mental displacement, since all of them are orphans, adopted by a grandmother, an aunt or a stepfather.

The “mental displacement”⁷² causes an unhappy life, instability and a sense of enslavement even in their adoptive families. All the characters suffer from psychological trauma. With reference to the novel, Violet experienced her father’s abandonment of the family, which caused the suicide of her mother in the river. Joe is also an orphan, and was adopted by Frank and Rod Williams. Dorcas also lived the same situation when her parents were killed in the Race Riots in July 1917, she was adopted by her aunt Alice Manfred.

3. Themes in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*

To examine the themes of the novel, we have relied on the theory of New Historicism, which “takes into consideration the study of the relationship of any given historical text in relation to its cultural and social context.”⁷³ As we have noted above, Toni Morrison relies on her own

imagination to empower the history of her nation and sheds light on the tragic experience and misery of the African American people.

This is what we find in Toni Morrison's narrative. It explores key issues connected to the African Americans society, culture and experience in the United States of America. These issues are mainly neglected by the White American writers. Toni Morrison's *Jazz* is deeply historical, it is not only about tracing and picking up historical events, but it sheds light on the major Black issues that the Afro-American people experienced in America, by using her own imagination, which can help in the understanding of history. In *Jazz*, the writer mainly writes about violence, crisis of identity, betrayal disillusionment, and the role of Jazz music in the Afro-American culture.

A-Violence in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

Violence can be defined as a bad act, which can cause destruction, pain or suffering. It is a major issue discussed in Toni Morrison's sixth novel *Jazz*, and this issue is expressed in different ways and settings in the novel.

First, it is practiced in the rural South of the United States of America before the Great Migration of the main characters of the novel as well as other African Americans. The Afro-Americans in general and the characters of the novel in particular were exposed to all sorts of physical and psychological violence, especially Violet who is forced to do a difficult work in the fields and plantations. Violet stated that she hauled hay in Virginia and a four-mule team in the brace.⁷⁴ Indeed; Violet was subjected to a lot of physical violence, and beaten every time she was late in the field row.⁷⁵

Second, violence is also practiced after the Great Migration when the African Americans moved from the rural South to the urban North, when the waves of black people running from want and violence crested in the 80s and the 90s but was a steady stream in 1906 when Joe and Violet joined it.⁷⁶ The migrants were not welcomed by the Whites in the city; they were terrified by them.⁷⁷ This is one of the causes of the riots, which took place East St. Louis in 1917. As some

say: “they were Whites terrified by the waves of the Southern Negroes flooding the towns.”⁷⁸The riots resulted in great damages : “Over two hundred deads [...] so many Whites killed the papers would not print the number.”⁷⁹

Third, Violet in her turn committed a violent act, after she discovers her husband’s betrayal with the young girl. She goes to the funeral of the dead girl and tries to destroy and slash her face with a knife. As a result, her name becomes ‘violent’ instead of Violet. Finally, as we notice the city is considered as the Promised Land for the migrants, as it seemed to be able to provide a better and safer life. But in reality, the City is full of violence, “you have to understand that what is like taking in a big City: I’m exposed to all sorts of ignorance and criminality, still this is the only life for me.”⁸⁰ It is also claimed that:

Every week since Dorcas’s death, during the whole of January, February, a paper laid pair the bones of some broken woman. Man kills wife. Eight accused of rape dismissed. Woman and girl victims of woman commits suicide. White attackers. Five women caught. Woman says man beat. In jealous rage man.⁸¹

This means that violence is spread everywhere in the United States of America and the city is not a place to escape violence.

B- Identity Crisis in Toni Morrison’s *Jazz*

Identity is an important concept that Toni Morrison develops in her narrative *Jazz*. Before we analyze this term according to the novel, first, we have to define it in general. Identity is a term that has a complex definition. Stephen Lawler ,the author of “Identity: Sociological Perspectives”(2008), asserts that “it seems impossible to provide a single overarching definition of the term since there are various ways of theorizing the concept, each of which develops different kind of definitions.”⁸² In other words, the term identity has different definitions, each has his/her own way to define it and/or interpret it. Although, at this position it is practical to try to give a general definition for the concept of identity.

According to Merriam Webster Dictionary, identity is “the set of qualities and beliefs that make one person or group different from others.”⁸³ It means that we create our identity by collecting features that apply to our inner and outer selves such as skin color, gender, profession, sexual preferences, religion and language. The combination of these features then distinguishes us from other people.

As an African American female writer, Toni Morrison tries to show to people, who are still making a difference between the African and the White American people, that there is no distinction between them. She also denies the existence of multiculturalism in the United States of America, and claims that there is a racial difference between people with a diverse ethnical background. In one of her interviews, Toni Morrison affirms that “literary language with her work is an instrument of national regeneration.”⁸⁴ This illustration shows that Toni Morrison writes in order to make a place for the African literature in the American literature, to defend the Afro-American people, and she tries to put stress on the notion of cultural pluralism instead of racial differences. In other words, Toni Morrison denies the idea of racism and tries to put an end to those differences that exist between the Afro-Americans and the White people. This is why her novel is free from white characters, since she wanted to give a remarkable space for the black Americans and depict the Afro- Americans’ realities.

The novel is also about social matters. Thus, the search for identity is one of the central subjects that Toni Morrison examines in her novel. We can notice that the major characters in her narration, such as: Joe, Violet Trace and Dorcas, have experienced loss of maternal tenderness that led them to search for their identities. In fact, Joe and Violet Trace are both victims of the trauma caused by racism. Their past lives affected their present lives in struggling to find their real identities. Because of racism, Joe and Violet Trace try to achieve completeness, self-ownership and to search for individual sovereignty. This happens to the two characters near the end of the novel; for instance, when Felice says that she believes that Joe still loves his wife, and Violet tells

her that she lost herself along the way. The following examples illustrate the conversation between Felice and Violet:

“We the world for if you can’t make you can’t make it up the way you want it?”
“The way I want it?” “Yeah. The way you want it. Don’t you want it to be something more than what it is? “What’s the point?” I can change it”
“That’s the point. If you do not, it will change you and it will be your fault cause you let it. I let it. And messed up my life.”
“Messed it up how?”
“Forget it.”
“Forgot?”
“Forgot it was mine. My life. I just ran up and down the streets wishing I was somebody else.”
“Who? Who’d you want to be?”
“Not who so much as what. White. Light. Young again.”⁸⁵

This conversation reveals to the reader that Violet is not a crazy woman, as the other hairdresser thinks, and she demonstrates that her identity has been taken away from her. In addition, it shows the differences that exist between two generations of Afro-Americans before and after the Great Migration. That is to say, the first generation refers to the people who still live in the South under the terrible conditions of slavery, while the second generation refers to the one taken to the city, where they were hoping to begin a new life. However, they learn that the freedom that they are searching for cannot be found in the city because of the presence of racism. Their sad memories also stood as an obstacle to live a normal life.

Identity is also illustrated in the novel by the character of Golden Gray who also has difficulties to find peace with his identity. Golden Gray is the son of a White woman and a Black man; he grows up with questioning his identity and sense of belonging. When Golden Gray discovers that his father is a Black man, he feels that the latter has polluted his identity as a white man. He tries to kill him, but he is haunted by the idea that even if he succeeds in killing his father,

his whiteness will never be fully recognized. He realizes that he will never be black or white; as result, he finds himself in a dilemma.

C- Betrayal in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

Betrayal is another issue in *Jazz* by Toni Morrison. Most of the main characters face and suffer from betrayal. As a first illustration, Violet is betrayed twice: once by her husband, Joe, who betrays her with a young girl of eighteen years old for the reason that “her silences annoy and puzzle him.”⁸⁶ The second betrayal is from the part of Malvonne, a neighbor of the Traces in Lenox Avenue. After a long conversation with Joe Trace, who convinces her to rent him her apartment, which allows him to use it as a den for his forbidden love with another woman, Joe confesses that: “Violet takes better care of her parrot than she does him. The rest of the time she’s cooking pork that he cannot eat or pressing hair he can’t stand the smell of.”⁸⁷ At the end, Malvonne accepts the request of Joe Trace and betrays her neighbor Violet, who enters in a great depression because of this betrayal. She remembers her father’s abandonment and the suicide of her mother, and she considers this abandonment as a betrayal of the family.

Violet is not the only character who experiences betrayal, her husband Joe also enters in a same depression as his wife because of the betrayal of his teenager lover, Dorcas. The latter betrays him with Acton, a young man of her generation.

In the spring of 1926, on a raining afternoon, anybody passing through the alley next certain apartment house on Lenox might have looked up and seen not a child but a grown man’s face crying along with glass pan. A strange sight you hardly ever see: me crying so openly. It’s not a thing they do.⁸⁸

As a result, Joe Trace commits a crime and kills Dorcas by shooting her at a party. The later suffers from regret and depression. Toni Morrison examines the theme of betrayal within the Black community. She makes reference to the fact that it is true that the first Africans are brought to the United States of America. They are originated from Africa; but their children, who are the

following generations, are African Americans originating from the United States of America.

Those Africans are not considered as native Americans; therefore, this is an indirect betrayal:

Some said that the rioters were disgruntled veterans fought in all colored units, were refused the service of the YMCA over there are over here, and came home to white violence more intense than when they enlisted and unlike battle they fought in Europe, stateside fighting was pitiless and totally without honor.⁸⁹

This means the Afro-Americans youth fought in Europe side by side with the Whites, but with their return to the United States of America, they faced a great intense of violence instead of getting their civil rights as American citizens, which is another betrayal for the Black community.

D- Disillusionment in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

Disillusionment is the concept strongly connected to the real life of the African Americans. Toni Morrison discusses this concept in relation to the main characters of her novel *Jazz*. Joe and Violet are among many African Americans who migrated to the urban North with the hope for a better life, housing, safety, and escape violence, racism, segregation and harsh conditions of life in the South. In reality, Joe and Violet have been disillusioned, because they do not find the life that they have aspired to. First of all, the newcomers are not welcomed by the Whites, as it is well illustrated in the novel: "they were Whites terrified by the waves of southern Negroes flooding in the towns."⁹⁰ In other words, the Whites refuse to accept the migrants because they see them as inferior, savages and a threat, and the suitable work for them is to work in the plantations and fields with cheap wages.

The new life that the Blacks look forward to is very difficult to achieve under such conditions. As we have explained above, life in the City is not easy and safe like they have imagined: "Nobody says that it's pretty here nobody says it's easy, what is decisive and if you pay attention to the street plans, all laid out, the City can't hurt you."⁹¹ Adding to that, violence that they want to escape is also present in the City even with more intensity than in the South because

of their dark skins; they have been exposed to all sorts of horrors, criminality and ignorance. Furthermore, the migrants, mainly Joe and Violet, do not find an easy life in the urban North. Violet is obliged to work all the day as a hairdresser to gain a few dollars, while Joe has to work two Jobs; during the day, he works as a salesman of cosmetics, and in the evening he works in a hotel.

In short, the migration to the urban North is seen as a dream and the Promised Land for the Southern Black Americans who want to reach it. But in reality, it is an illusion for the migrants who are not welcomed in the City. The latter is a den of violence, discrimination and racism, and life there is not as easy as they hoped for.

E- The Role of Music in Toni Morrison's *Jazz*

Jazz music is a very important art in the African American culture; it plays a great role to expose their tradition, culture, identity and literature. Toni Morrison, in her novel, *Jazz* uses Jazz music to shape her text and make reference to the importance of culture. As Jennifer Andrews claims: "Morrison uses jazz music and its rhythms to shape her text, since jazz music is a very important art that shapes the American culture and literature."⁹² The author uses jazz music not as a musical background or decorative reference but "she wants the work, *Jazz*, to be a manifestation of the music intellect, sensuality, its history, its range and its modernity."⁹³ Morrison's use of music, songs and voice is deeply connected to the African American traditional aesthetic or artistic forms.

Indeed, the use of music in her fiction interplays between the shape of the text and the content of the novel. By making reference to the importance of jazz music and the Afro-American culture and relating *jazz* to the language used in the novel, this gives a specific rhythm to the sentences when hearing and reading them. As it is cited in the introduction of "Essays on Works of Toni Morrison's *Jazz*", which is published in 2014: "through the use of music in her fiction,

Morrison points the fact that mechanisms of embodied consciousness are also deeply connected to music as it is revealed by the interplay between the form and the content in her work.”⁹⁴

Toni Morrison remembers when her mother sang the way other people muse. A constant background drift of sound that Toni Morrison took for granted like oxygen. For her, Jazz music is as important as oxygen, Morrison adds that: “Like the music that came to be known as “Jazz”, she (Morrison’s mother) took from everywhere, knew everything, gospel, classic, blues and hymns.”⁹⁵

More than that, music in this novel is described both in positive and negative ways. On the one hand, it is used as a tool for the Afro-American people to express themselves freely; on the other hand, it is expressed negatively. One of the most striking and clear examples in *Jazz* is when Violet and Joe Trace migrated from the rural South to the urban North for the want of freedom and to experience a new life. As it is illustrated in the novel: “Joe stood up, his fingers clutching the baggage rack above his head. He felt the dancing better that way, and told Violet to do the same. They were hanging there, a young country couple, laughing and tapping back at the track.”⁹⁶

They feel free even before they arrive to the City. They strongly feel free when they are on the train, from Vesper (Virginia) to the City. The influence of Jazz music is exemplified in the novel by the fact that the couple spends half of its way to the City dancing on the train, by hearing the imaginary music in their minds.

Jazz music is also used in the novel as a means of expressing freedom and civil rights. This is illustrated by the march or the protest of 1917, which was held by the African Americans. It was an answer to the violent riots that took place in East Saint Louis. It was a silent march and the only sound heard in the protest was the beat of the drums. We notice that the music has been used as a means of protestation and request for their freedom and civil rights. In contrast, the jazz music is seen as a disapproval tool which is exemplified in the novel by Dorcas’s aunt, Alice Manfred. Although Alice has sympathized with the African Americans who ask for their rights,

she fears that this music can destroy the principles of her community and create more hostility among the White and Black people. Alice is persuaded that:

The music was getting worse and worse with each passing season the Lord waited to make Himself known. Songs that used to start in the head and fill the heart had dropped on down, down to places below the sash and the buckled belts. Alice thought the lowdown music had something to do with the silent black women and men marching down Fifth Avenue to advertise their anger over two hundred dead in East St. Louis, two of whom were her sister and brother-in-law, killed in the riots.⁹⁷

It means that Alice Manfred fears from this music, which probably results in real danger for her community, because her niece Dorcas is killed at her young age at a party where jazz music is mostly played.

To sum up, we have examined in this chapter Toni Morrison's sixth novel *Jazz* from a literary perspective. In fact, we have discussed the way the author constructs her narrative by recording real facts and experiences of the African Americans in the United States of America. The first part of this chapter examines the major narrative techniques that Toni Morrison used in terms of plot and structure of the novel. Her unique style of writing attracts and instigates us to dig deeper in her fictional work. The second part of the chapter provides a deep analysis of the main characters of the novel who are strongly connected to the real status of African Americans' tragic and traumatic experience in the United States of America. The third part sheds light on the key issues that Toni Morrison tackled in the novel. Morrison relates them to the issues that concern the Black people and their experience in the United States of America, both in the rural South and the urban North. These issues are mainly: violence, struggling for their identity, betrayal, disillusionment and the role of jazz music in self-expression, freedom and civil rights experience.

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⁶⁴Ibid, 25.

⁶⁵Ibid, 24.

⁶⁶Ibid, 57.

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IV. Conclusion

This dissertation has discussed historical and artistic fiction in Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1992). The novel emphasizes the most important historical moments in the history of the Afro-American people and their presence in the United States of America, as it focuses on the key issues related to the traumatic experiences of the Black American society and culture. Toni Morrison resorts to real historical facts to construct her fiction by using her own imagination in recording the African American history and social issues. In our analysis of the novel, we have tried to study the major historical facts mentioned in the narrative and examine the aesthetic, the beauty and Morrison's use of her own imagination to construct her work.

The first chapter has focused on the important events from history such as the Great Migration (1906), the 1917 East St. Louis riots, the Harlem Renaissance (1920), and the Roaring Twenties (1920) which had great influence in forming the American history in general and the African American one in particular. The second chapter has examined the novel from a literary perspective through which we have attempted to shed light on Toni Morrison's unique style and analyze the major narrative techniques she used to construct her fiction. We have also provided a deep analysis of the characters that the author has created in her work, who are strongly connected to the African American urban life. Moreover, we have highlighted the key issues that Toni Morrison tackled in her narrative in relation to the African American experiences which are violence, African Americans' identity crisis, betrayal, disillusionment, and the role of jazz music in self-expression, freedom and civil rights expression.

Toni Morrison, in her novel *Jazz*, writes about historical, social and cultural matters in which she exposes the historical realities and the experience of the Black Americans that are represented in a fictional work, in intent to expose the worth of the African American culture and history. In a nutshell, through our analysis of this novel, we have come to conclude that Toni

Morrison's fictional work is about revealing a period in African American life through a specific lens.

At the end of this dissertation, we would like to remind that in addition to our analysis on the issue of historical facts and artistic fiction by Toni Morrison's *Jazz*, further research may be carried out on Toni Morrison's literary works on different other issues. Since Toni Morrison is known as a very talented African American author who plays a great role to empower the Black Americans and demonstrate the worth of the Afro-American literary and artistic heritage.

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