A QUEST FOR THE SELF: TONI MORRISON'S SEARCH FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S CULTURAL IDENTITY

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1. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

2. The advanced study in the English Language and Literature graduate program of which this thesis is part has consisted of:

i) Research Methods courses both in the undergraduate and graduate programs.

ii) English literature as well as American literature including novel, poetry and drama studies, a comparative approach to world literatures, and examination of several literary theories as well as critical approaches which have contributed to this thesis in an effective way.

3. This thesis is composed of the main sources including several books by the major authors discussed in comparison; and the secondary sources including scholarly articles from academic journals as well as newspaper articles, and theoretical books on the history and improvement of African American women's cultural identity. The thesis style guides of Turkish universities and international universities as well as many relevant books published by university presses on this subject.

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ABSTRACT

A QUEST FOR THE SELF: TONI MORRISON'S SEARCH FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN'S CULTURAL IDENTITY

Banu MERTOĞLU

The aim of this thesis is to discuss the cultural identity of African American women in three novels of Toni Morrison: The Bluest Eye, Song of Solomon and Tar Baby. African American women's cultural identity is worth to study because as the victims of sexism and racism they undergo a process of shaping their identity in between two cultures. The dominant American culture presents them as inferior and forces them to imitate American culture in order to be accepted while their African roots expect them to be strong because they are regarded to be the "culture bearers", the ones who will transfer culture to the next generations.

Toni Morrison, as an African American novelist, focuses on this situation of African American women in her novels. She depicts all kinds of women from different ages and from different standpoints towards culture, and by this way she presents that all the women in her novels experience a quest for self. She believes that art should be political, so in her novels she warns her readers not to be disconnected from their cultural heritage, not to follow the standards of the dominant

culture blindly and at the same time not to turn their back on American culture completely; in a way, she believes in the hybridity of cultures.

Key words:
African-American women, Culture, Identity, Toni Morrison.

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KISA ÖZET

TONİ MORRİSON'UN AFRİKAN-AMERİKAN KADINLARIN KÜLTÜREL KİMLİĞİNİ BULMA ÇABASI

Banu MERTOĞLU

Bu çalışmanın amacı Toni Morrison'un üç romanında, En Mavi Göz, Solomon'un Şarkısı ve Katran Bebek, Afrikan-Amerikan kadınların kültürel kimliğini incelemektir. Afrikan Amerikan kadınlar cinsel ayrımcılığın ve ırkçılığın kurbanları olarak kimliklerini iki kültür arasında oluşturma sürecinden geçerler ve bu da onların kültürel kimliğini çalışmaya değer kılar. Onları "kültür taşıyıcı", yani kültürü gelecek nesillere taşıyacak olanlar olarak gören Afrikan kökleri onlardan güçlü olmalarını beklerken; diğer yandan, baskın Amerikan kültürü Afrikan Amerikan kadınları değersiz olarak takdim eder ve kabul edilebilmek için onları Amerikan kültürünü taklit etmeye zorlar.

Afrikan Amerikan bir yazar olarak Toni Morrison romanlarında Afrikan Amerikan kadınların bu durumlarına ağırlık verir. Romanlarında kültüre karşı farklı bakış açılarına sahip, farklı yaşlarda her tür kadını resmeder ve böylece romanlarındaki tüm kadınların kimlik arayışı içerisinde olduğunu gösterir. Sanatın politik olması gerektiğine inandığından ötürü romanlarında okuyucularını kültürel miraslarından kopmamaları, baskın kültürü körü körüne takip etmemeleri ve aynı

zamanda Amerikan kültürüne tamamen sırtlarını dönmemeleri konusunda uyarır; bir bakıma, kültürlerin melez olduğuna inanır.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Afrikan-Amerikan kadınlar, Kültür, Kimlik, Toni Morrison.

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INTRODUCTION

America is a multicultural country where many cultures come together, and African American culture is one of them. However, the history of African American people places them a special position where the experience of negative events continues to be an important factor shaping their identities. Colonialism not only dominated people but also affected African American culture and history, and eventually their identity. Their identity was shaped according to the definitions of the colonizers, and when the colonization ended, reshaping identity was not easy because the internalized racism was still alive. Being "the Other of the Other," this process was even harder for African American women because they were also victims of sexism as well as racism. In this thesis, I will focus on three novels of Toni Morrison, The Bluest Eye, Song of Solomon and Tar Baby, in order to demonstrate how cultural identity is constructed in African American women. Then, with these examples I will conclude that Morrison believes in the hybridity of cultures: she wants African American women to be aware of their cultural heritage but at the same time she doesn't want them to exclude American values completely.

In the first chapter of the thesis, I focus on the historical realities and external forces shaping the cultural identity of African Americans. While showing the difficulty of African Americans' shaping their identity, I apply the theories of critics such as W.E.B Du Bois, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Homi Bhabha, Frantz Fanon, Edward Said and Stuart Hall. Race was the most important part of African American identity because its

visible quality rendered them into the binary category of black which was represented as the exact opposite of white. The difficulty in shaping identity stems from the dominant structure of the American culture which depicted African Americans as the inferior. Through representations in mass media, whites assured their status as superior, and many African Americans started to believe this illusion as they were surrounded by images affirming their inferiority. Then, they were trapped in a dilemma as they wanted to imitate the dominant culture in order to be accepted, but on the other hand they had their own cultural heritage. This process was more difficult for women who were not only victims of racism, but also sexism. African American women were not represented in popular culture and the few ones represented were negative, so they were dragged into the beauty myth created by Western culture which made them believe in their ugliness. By this way they were trapped into a false illusion forcing them to imitate Western culture and reject the roles given by their own cultural heritage. In her novels, Toni Morrison focuses on the cultural identity of women because she thinks that the novel has to be socially responsible and beautiful at the same time. And as an African American woman, Morrison tries to keep her culture alive while depicting the lives of her feminine characters.

The second chapter demonstrates the negative effects of the dominant culture on African American women's identity in Morrison's characters. African American women are surrounded by beauty images, and this leads their self esteem to be low. They want to be accepted by society, and in order to achieve this they feel the need to be loved: they only feel secure about their identity when they are loved because they regard love

as a form of acceptance. If they do not achieve love, they self-question themselves and especially their ugliness. In this sense The Bluest Eye questions the place of beauty in the lives of the feminine characters. At the beginning of their identity formation the girls in the novel are affected negatively by the standards of beauty: Pecola cannot find love in her community and her family, so she wants to have blue eyes as she thinks they will make her lovable. Pecola's mother Pauline is also affected by the images she has seen in the movies. Since she cannot achieve the standards in the movies, she looks for happiness in the house of whites she is working for, and thus she stops providing the role as a nurturer for her family which is a part of her culture. On the other hand, in Song of Solomon Hagar assumes that her boyfriend left her because of her ugliness so she tries to change her appearance in order to be loved and accepted. Also, Alma Estee in Tar Baby wants to wear a wig in order to hide her identity as she thinks her hair is not capable of providing her the safety she wants to feel. By means of all these characters, Morrison depicts the negative effects of the dominant culture on African American women, and as a solution she advices women not to suppress their pain as she thinks they can only build a strong cultural identity by revealing their feelings. Then it is seen that Morrison's way of creating her own cultural identity is transforming traumatic experiences into narrative in her novels: while telling the story of African American women, she also emphasizes the importance of cultural identity.

The third chapter focuses on the role of African American women as "culture bearers," and it questions whether they can achieve their role when the two cultures are pitted against each other. Morrison questions the new generation's lack of knowledge on

their cultural heritage and therefore reminds again the role of women as culture bearers and gives place to the ancestral figure as the provider of culture in her novels. There is no such figure in The Bluest Eye and this causes difficulties for the girls in the novel while constructing their identity. Contrary to The Bluest Eye, Pilate in Song of Solomon is the one who can achieve her role and help Milkman find his roots throughout the novel. Her presence makes Milkman feel safe, and he can learn his cultural identity because she educates him into the culture. On the other hand, Jadine in Tar Baby cannot decide whether she should pursue her role as a nurturer or she should continue to adopt Euro-American self-consciousness. She is a character who is educated in Western culture, and she prefers Euro-American values to Afro-American ones but seeing characters like the woman in yellow and the swamp women who are the symbols of "true" blackness and womanhood, she starts to question her cultural stance. However, in the end she rejects her role as a culture bearer and returns back to her Euro-American lifestyle. Morrison wants her readers to remember African culture in which there is always an elder, and she reminds African American women their role as culture bearers.

In the conclusion, I summarize the ways in which women are affected by racism and sexism at the same time. This leads African American women to be vulnerable and their cultural identity formation is affected negatively for this reason. Morrison's women represent the difficulties that all the African American women experience in real life. While depicting the struggle of women to form a cultural identity of their own, Morrison uses African models to present their experience such as story telling, oral tradition and ancestor as the providers of culture. In the end, she asserts that both denying the African

part of their culture and American part is dangerous for African women. She thinks that there should be a balance between the two cultures. She wants African American women to be aware of their cultural heritage and educate the new generation into culture. However, this doesn't mean that they need to ignore American culture. African American women in Morrison's view should look back to their culture's origins in order to practice their roles but at the same time they should be connected with the American mainstream.

CHAPTER 1:

CULTURE, IDENTITY, AND TONI MORRISON

1.1. External Forces Shaping African American Identity

African American culture has an important place in American history, from the beginning of the slave trade to the present. African American culture is rooted in Africa but for the ones brought to America by imperialist powers, practicing cultural values and traditions was not an easy task. Even when slavery legally ended in 1865, African Americans found themselves struggling to form their identity because racism did not end in parallel with colonialism. In Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora Michelle Maria Wright argues that because of racism African American identity is produced in contradiction. According to her:

> Unlike Black Africans, who ultimately define themselves through shared histories, languages and cultural values, Blacks in the diaspora possess an intimidating array of historical, cultural, national, ethnic, religious, and ancestral origins and influences. At the same time, despite this range of differences, they are most often identified in the West as simply 'Black' and therefore as largely homogeneous. Given these contradictions, the attempt to offer an overarching definition for Blackness looks to be a loosing game. (1,2)

Being black becomes the dominant factor shaping the identities of African Americans because their differences are not recognized in white America. This situation puts

African Americans' cultural identity in danger, since they start to redefine themselves for the sake of being recognized. In this regard, cultural identity can be described as:

> the sense of belonging to a cultural community that reaffirms self or personhood for the individual and is created by: the people, their interactions, and the context in which they relate. Cultural identity is comprised of values, mores, meanings, customs, and beliefs used to relate to the world; it continually defines what it was, what it is, and what it is becoming. (Jackson 10)

For many African Americans this process of shaping cultural identity turns out to be a painful experience as they have difficulty in practicing their values which collide with the world they live in.

Culture presents a framework through which communities interpret their past, understand their present and imagine their future (Mullings 190), and since racist experience is a fatal part of African American history, it cannot be separated from African Americans' cultural identity. Race is not simply related to skin color or hair texture, culture is also a part of race which is defined in America in order to strengthen the superiority of whites over non-whites; this leads race to be an inherent part of defining one's identity: "Race is both a marker and a maker of identity that, no matter how unstable, abides by certain expectations, responses and circumscriptions—in short, race has meaning because it takes recognizable and repeatable forms" (Castronovo 554-55). But this does not to mean that race is the only determinant of one's identity as it is argued by Spilman: "Historical and cultural identity is not constituted by having a body

with particular identifying features, but it cannot be comprehended without such features and the significance attached to them" (280). Being black makes African Americans identifiable and thus their identity is shaped in the process of fragmentation: "instead of restricting African American identity by limiting it to either one kind of body or even one kind of social division, 'race' now allows African American identity to be conceived as infinitely fluid" (Hale 463).

Since many African Americans have never lived or visited Africa, they feel disconnected to African culture, but their skin color marks their identity: "If people look at you, and you may have a darker tone to your skin. Immediately, they're not going to ask you if you're African or if you're from Trinidad, they're going to say that you're Black and assume that you're African American" (Jackson 80). African Americans are disconnected from their heritage and at the same time not accepted by American culture which renders them to be black only. Therefore, African Americans feel anxiety while constructing their lifestyles within Euro-American culture. Frantz Fanon gives the reason of this anxiety as the feeling of inferiority in Black Skins White Masks and claims that "the Negro having been made inferior, proceeds from humiliating insecurity through strongly voiced self-accusation to despair" (60). In order to achieve the certainty of oneself, self-recognition is essential, and since African Americans are not recognized effectively by the other, the other remains to be the theme of their actions (216). African Americans encounter a psychological dilemma of viewing themselves from a Euro-American perspective which forces them to imitate Euro-American culture. Their

diasporic situation puts them into a position that their practice of cultural tradition is restricted and over time it is blended with European American culture:

> As Clifford illustrated, the black diaspora seems to be "complexly related to Africa and the Americans, to shared histories of enslavement, racist subordination, cultural survival, hybridization, resistance and political rebellion". Therefore, diaspora represents transnationality, political struggles, local community, and historical displacement. The aforementioned struggles contribute to the fluidity and fixity of diaspora and the diasporic consciousness, which ultimately impacts one's social and cultural inclusion or dislocation. (Patton 32-33)

African American culture is distinct from the mainstream culture because white America achieves its identity in relation to black America with its power of whiteness which marginalizes other identities. Due to this exclusion, black America inevitably forms its own distinctive culture which may result "in double consciousness." W.E.B Du Bois explains this situation in these words:

> After the Egyptian and Indian, The Greek and Roman, The Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One

> ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (Du Bois 7)

African Americans want to embody two different identities at the same time: they embrace African culture by tradition and accept American culture out of necessity. The conditions they live in do not give any other choice: to be recognized, they need to embody American elements. The conflict between the two oppositional cultural realities then turns out to be the biggest weapon of imperialism which is called by Ngugi wa Thiong'o the "cultural bomb." He argues that the cultural bomb has the effect:

> …to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them to see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from the wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves. (3)

According to this quote we can infer that African American identity is defined by two conflicting cultural essences: African and American. That is to say African culture is not only different from "but still part of the dominant American culture, it is itself a pluralistic entity. By definition, African American culture is a combination of African and Euro-American elements…simultaneously part of and separate from white culture" (wa Thiong'o 13). The problem of African American identity is the result of the crash between natural African personality and unnatural influence of American society. This

clash creates alienation from American society which is described by Du Bois as being "shut out from their world by a vast veil" (6). It is this veil that creates a double consciousness within the black personality.

With the impact of American culture, African Americans fall into a dilemma of how to preserve their African roots while living in an American world, and therefore, with this double consciousness, some circumstances which affect the normal functioning of black personality occur as Joseph A. Baldwin, a specialist in African psychology, addresses:

> These circumstances, where they do occur, are usually sociocultural in nature. In other words, such mitigating circumstances typically occur in a sociocultural context whereby the Black personality—its African reality structure—is superimposed upon an alien (non African) reality structure. This usually occurs in a so-called multiracial-multicultural social order such as American society. In such an unnatural sociocultural context for the Black personality in particular is subject to weakening and distortion from the superimposed influence of the alien cosmology. Again, this will be especially true where all institutional systemic supports are controlled by the alien cosmology as well. (Baldwin 183-84)

According to Baldwin's Africentric model "black personality consists of a core system called *African Self-Extension Orientation* and *African Self Consciousness,* and a number of basic traits emanating from the core" (180). The African Self Extension Orientation as the unconscious and biogenetically determined principle forms the basis of the entire

system. African Self Consciousness originates from The African Self Extension Orientation and it is conscious, so it is partly determined by the environment and experience. Consequently, it is clear that according to Baldwin, African Self Consciousness determines the African survival thrust inherent in the black identity (180). However, living in an alien environment African Americans may experience personality disorder due to the fact that, "the natural African survival thrust of African Self Consciousness becomes distorted to an anti-African/self-destructive 'alien survival thrust'" (Baldwin 184). Thus, the disunity between African Self Consciousness and African Self Extension Orientation stemming from the dominance of alien American culture may show itself in three kinds of mental disorders which are the Alien-Self Disorders, the Anti-Self Disorders and the Self-Destructive Disorders. (186)

All those psychological problems occur due to African Americans' struggle to establish a place of their own in the cultural context. Finding themselves on the frontiers between cultures African Americans may start to question the meaning of culture as Homi Bhabha articulates:

> Culture becomes as much an uncomfortable, disturbing practice of survival and supplementarity—between art and politics, past and present, the public and the private—as its resplendent being is a moment of pleasure, enlightenment or liberation. It is from such narrative positions that the postcolonial prerogative seeks to affirm and extend a new collaborative dimension, both within the margins of the nation-space and across boundaries between nations and peoples. (251-52)

When the binary oppositions between black and white are solved, Bhabha believes that cultures can interact freely. Therefore, he insists that cultural identity is hybrid and this stems from the interactions of cultures and mutual assimilations they experience. In the words of Bhabha:

> The theoretical recognition of the split-space of enunciation may open the way to conceptualizing an *inter*national culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription, articulation of culture's *hybridity*. To that end we should remember that it is the 'inter'—the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space that carries the burden of the meaning of culture. (56)

Edward Said also agrees with Bhabha on hybridity of cultures, and in Culture and Imperialism, he asserts that it is now time to rejoin the cultural and aesthetic realms. However, Said is aware that this is not an easy task because since the eighteenth century isolating them was the essence of experience in the West, "not only to acquire distant domination and reinforce hegemony, but also to divide the realms of culture and experience into apparently separate spheres" (68). According to Bhabha's and Said's views on culture, African people living in America can exchange some of the values of their culture with Americans, and Americans can adopt African values, too. However, this can be possible only on equal grounds where one culture is not regarded superior to the other. In a community which grounded its politics on racist ideology for centuries this process was not easy to handle. Therefore, many African Americans suffered from

the interaction of these two cultures, and they tried to create a cultural identity out of one dominant and a dominated one.

Stuart Hall, cultural theorist and sociologist, claims that there are two different ways of thinking about cultural identity; first one asserts that because of the shared culture there is one true self:

> Our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people', with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. (51)

With this definition we understand that our similarities coming from our shared past forms our cultural identity. On the other hand, according to the second one, as well as similarities, there are also differences shaping what we are, and in this second sense:

> Cultural identity is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as well as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture…Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past. (Hall 52)

The effect of the colonial experience comes clearer with this second form because it shows that cultural identity is fluid and representation may become an important element in shaping it. The dominant group has the power to represent the culture and history of the other groups, so by redefining the standards of beauty and deciding the acceptable forms of ideology they maintain domination. Even after the colonization was over for a

long time, African Americans had difficulty in building a strong identity because all the forms of representation were pointing at the Euro-American model, and they were not a part of the visual culture because they were neither seen (accepted) nor shown (represented). And the rarely represented ones were the negative ones, so: “Both black females and males were uncertain about their womanhood and manhood. They were both striving to adapt themselves to standards set by the dominant white society” (Hooks, “Ain’t I” 178).

1.2. African American Women and Cultural Identity

DuBois' terms of "double consciousness" and "second sight of the veil," as we have seen above, are applicable to African American women. However, women also have a special condition which creates a "triple consciousness of being the forefront of race, class, and gender conflict" (Mullings 125). With the clash of gender subordination, economic exploitation and racial oppression their cultural identity becomes vulnerable. Michele Wallace summarizes this situation of African American women as the "Other of the Other" (qtd. in Wright 136) because they are at the bottom of the racial order which makes the situation worse for them:

> Social position, specifically that entailed by race and gender, allows some social groups more than others, 'blacks' more than 'whites' and black women more than black men, to be especially self conscious of the socially constructed division that constructs their identity. (Hale 462)

In order to understand the cultural identity of African American women, who share a common experience of oppression, one should incorporate an Afrocentric perspective because it is not possible to understand "what African American women are today without having a historical perspective for what their ancestors were, especially as it relates to the roles, functions and responsibilities that women traditionally held within the family unit" (Burgess 393). Of course this doesn't mean that one should stick on history, on the contrary, since "cultures are dynamic, always developing, ever changing" (Mullings 191) we will look at the history of African American women for understanding the process of their cultural evolution.

Racism was an important element shaping Afro-American women because they were perceived to be the lowest in the social rank hierarchy, being women and black at the same time, thus, "both the categories of 'women' and 'race' assume the status of metaphors, so that each rhetoric of oppression can serve equally as a mirrored allegory for the other" (Suleri 762). Aside from the racial oppression affecting African American identity, for women of this social group there is one more dominant factor to be considered: sexism. "The struggle to end racism and the struggle to end sexism were naturally intertwined, that to make them separate was to deny a basic truth of our existence, that race and sex are both immutable facets of human identity" (Hooks, "Ain't I 13). Although it is true that African American women suffer from sexism (as white women experience), they are affected in different ways depending upon the extend to which they are affected by other form of oppression. That is to say, for Afro-American women, the fact that they are black makes sexism more severe, and the fact that they are women makes racism more violent. Thus, even in anti-racist organizations, "Black woman's struggle can easily be, and usually has been subordinated to the Black man's struggle," and in antisexist organizations "Black woman's struggle can easily be, and usually has been, subordinated to the white woman's struggle" (Spelman 277-8).

In the United States race as an externally imposed identity determines the status of African American women and often defines them as lascivious or inferior to "white ladies" (Phillips 27). "In the eyes of the 19th century white public, the black female was a creature unworthy of the title of woman; she was mere chattel, a thing, an animal" (Hooks, "Ain't I 159). Only white skinned women were presented as innocent and

according to this supremacist culture a female must be white to be in the space of femininity. A good example showing the difference between the social statuses of black and white women at the end of 19th century can be seen in the use of a black model in the first medical textbook of a vagina. It would have been a scandal if the model was a white woman; however, published in 1896 John Montgomery Baldy didn't hesitate to use a black model in his gynecology textbook since black women were already represented as lacking moral virtue (Craig 31). This might seem as an individual event; however, it is only one example of the practices of institutionalized racism. The dominant culture is programmed to devalue black women, and this devaluation supported by representation can be internalized by African American women while shattering their cultural identity because:

> Instead of thinking identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation. (Hall 51)

The unsatisfying images of black femaleness in the media, movies and art not only show how racist the white world sees black women but also reflects how black women see themselves, because most black women internalize external standards. Bell Hooks also complains about these unsatisfying images and recounts an event she has experienced in these words:

> Within white-supremacist patriarchal society, it is very difficult to find affirming images of black femaleness. A few years ago, I went to live in a

> new place where I knew no one, so it occurred to me that I needed to surround myself with life-affirming images of black womanness in my home to have in my midst representations of a nurturing community. I was shocked by how difficult it was to find representations of us where our features were not crudely distorted or exaggerated. I was dismayed by how many paintings showed us without eyes, or noses, or mouths. And I began to wonder if these body parts are "forgotten" because they represent the unloved, unliked parts, because they take us into realm of the senses. The problem that I encountered was not a dearth of imagery but a lack of appealing imagery. (Hooks, "Sisters" 83)

Living in these conditions many African Americans start to have low self esteem and accept the way they are represented.

The two forces, sexism and racism, intensified the sufferings and oppressions of black women. While they were inferior to white women because of racism, they were also inferior to black men and the area where this differentiation becomes clearer is the work arena: "The black male slave was primarily exploited as a laborer in the fields; the black female was exploited as a laborer in the fields, a worker in domestic household, a breeder, and as an object of white male sexual assault" (Hooks, "Ain't I 22). When slavery ended, the differentiation between black men and black women and also between black women and white women continued to exist. After slavery, because of the ongoing racist approach and, political and economic situation African American men were not able to earn an adequate family wage but they resisted married women to work outside

the home, however, this was impossible because they needed women to survive (Mullings 114). Because of the economic conditions African American women were generally in, they had to work and their role as workers was predetermined by the imperialist system. Most African American women, who were working as full time workers outside the home, had also the responsibility of running their own household which resulted in "double-day syndrome" for them (Mullings 62).

Working outside the home was a normal act for African American women in American culture, however, for the white women it was not the same because "the willingness of society to accept the role of African American women as workers, mothers, and spouses somehow decreased in value when identical roles performed by other women were not viewed similarly" (Burgess 400). The white capitalist system needed African American women's labor work, so although they wanted to keep their white women at home, they made black ones work for them. Within this internalized racist system, black women's status was already decreased "to perform antithetical roles as hypersexualized jezebel or desexualized mammy in order to legitimate white woman's relatively privileged status within this racial order" (qtd. in Gillman 134). Therefore, they could legitimize the situation as black women could work because they already do not acquire the qualities of women. The society created the conditions in which African American women had to work, but African Americans were also told by the scholars that their problems stem from their women whose work renders them "matriarchal" and "unfeminine" (Mullings 84). Bell Hooks touches on this problem that in the contemporary world white women's working is considered to be a positive act and

an indicator of independence, however “black women who enter the work force are encouraged to feel that they are taking jobs from black men or de-masculinizing them (Hooks, “Ain’t I 83).

During the World War II all women, black or white, had to be active in work area, but when it ended they were told that a woman’s place was at home. They were left in a situation to prove their femininity, and black women also wanted to have the qualities of the 50s motto of “idealized femininity” or the cult of “true womanhood.” Hooks explains this situation as follows:

> More than ever before in U.S. history, black women were obsessed with pursuing the ideal of femininity described on television, in books and magazines. An emerging middle class meant that groups of black females had more money than ever before to spend buying fashions, cosmetics, or reading magazines like *McCall’s* and *Ladies Home Journal.* Masses of black women who at one time were proud of their ability to work outside the home and yet be good housewives and mothers became discontented with their lot. They wanted only to be housewives and expressed their rage and hostility toward black men. (“Ain’t I” 178)

Black Power Movement, together with Civil Right Movement, led African Americans to form a consciousness of uplifting the race also in work area. Many women either stayed at home pursuing the ideal of “true womanhood” or they looked for different jobs:

> By the end of World War II, nearly 42 percent of African American women worked as household laborers, and that number dropped to 18 percent by 1970, when Civil Right Movement, federal laws prohibiting discrimination in the workplace, and opening of manufacturing and office jobs led African American women to seek employment beyond domestic service. (Phillips 27)

However, this didn't solve the problem for African American women who were faced with close scrutiny by society and this time labeled as "lazy" because of "playing the lady" and remaining at home (qtd. in Burgess 398). To conclude, whatever African American women did was not a solution, they were always regarded as inferior.

Probably the most negative effect of Western culture on women was creating a "beauty myth" for all women but it was more severe for African American women because the first standard of this myth was being white as it was reflected in the mass media. The dominant culture's reaction to something alien is to destroy it, thus they create the beauty myth and say that blacks are worthless and ugly ("Black Creation Annual" 9). Naomi Wolf argues that although the subjects of this myth are women, this myth is not about women at all; it's about men's institutions and these institutions form a culture dominated by men: "It is not that women's identities are naturally weak. But 'ideal' imagery has become obsessively important to women because it was meant to become so. Women are mere 'beauties' in men's culture so that culture can be kept male" (59). So that women's identity becomes dependent on their beauty which makes them "vulnerable to outside approval, carrying the vital sensitive organ of self-esteem exposed to air" (14). Lacking outside approval for beauty, African American women

tried ways to adapt external beauty standards and this process was not healthy for many women since “Psychotherapists have noted increased reports from their black women clients of guilt, shame, anger, and resentment about skin color, hair texture, facial features, and body size and shape” (qtd. in Patton 38).

Racism is so internalized that there is also a hierarchy of skin color among African Americans in which the lighter is better. This comes from American culture’s imposed standards which lead color discrimination to be present in African American community itself. Bell Hooks argues that “when a child is coming out of the womb one’s first concern is to identify its gender, whether male or female; I called attention to the reality that the initial concern for most black parents is skin color, because of correlation between skin color and success” (“Outlaw” 174-75). Since according to Euro-American standards white is presented as beautiful, among African American women the closest to white, the ones who had lighter had a higher position, so “Euro American standards of beauty not only created rifts between African American women but also pitted African American and other women against each other (Patton 41). Both male gaze and female gaze look for Euro American standards in the subjects of their looks, and social status of women is determined according to the result of this visual match. Darker skinned black females try to develop self-esteem in a society that devalues their image continuously.

With this institutionalized beauty myth African American women occupied a great place in the consumer culture since the advertisements were promoting a white standard of beauty which “targeted skin color and hair texture—the two characteristics

African Americans had to change if they expected to fit into American society" (Rooks 31). In Hair Raising Hooks explains the entire history of African American women's relation to politics of hair and beauty advertisements, and she acknowledges that even in 1992,

> African Americans represented 19 percent of the toiletries and cosmetics markets and, at the same time, bought 34 percent of all hair-care products sold. These figures indicate that African Americans spent three times more than other costumer groups on cosmetics, toiletries, and other grooming needs. (117)

Hair texture was an important expression of identity and straightening hair was a way of social acceptance.

With the Black Power Movement of 1960s African Americans started to question the norms dominated by American society and consequently this movement "raised and challenged the ingrained stereotypes of beauty that were and are perpetuated by Euro Americans. The movement also examined the psychological impact such beauty standards had on African American girls and women" (Patton 40). All social movements have the potential to change the culture, so at that time African Americans started their own standards of beauty. Moreover, in 1968 NAACP organized the first Miss Black America beauty contest as a protest against racism. Although, before 1960 straightened hair represented pride and modernity for black women, with this movement it turned out to represent racial shame (Craig 14-16). Many African American women stopped straightening their hair since it was seen as a self-devaluing act; even Malcolm X spoke

against it as causing Black people feel ashamed of their unique beauty by asserting African Americans to: “never accept images that have been created for you by someone else. It is always better to form the habit of learning how to see things for yourself: then you are in a better position to judge yourself” (Hooks, “Outlaw” 156). However, it didn’t last long and in the late 1970s and throughout 1980s assimilation became more dominant (Patton 29-40). The movement was not successful to change the dominant symbols and cultural transformation could not be achieved because the institutions which produce the representations were still in power. Without changing the system it was difficult to maintain a strong cultural identity as Hooks addresses:

> Widespread efforts to continue devaluation of black womanhood make it extremely difficult and oftentimes impossible for the black female to develop a positive self concept. For we are daily bombarded by negative images. Indeed, one strong oppressive force has been this negative stereotype and our acceptance of it as a viable role model upon which we can pattern ourselves. (“Ain’t I” 86)

The ideology of racism and sexism puts women into a category in which “one type of gender is superior to another, one type of woman superior to another, and one type of beauty is superior to another” (Patton 36). Being at the bottom of this hierarchy, African American women encounter many difficulties in building a positive identity of themselves. One of the most important handicap in this regard becomes the Euro-American standards of beauty because the limits of beauty determined by American culture becomes so fixed that it is not easy to erase it all at once. As it is seen in Patton’s

statement, “signified meanings over time by people, groups and politics become fixed to a group and can impact identity. Rather then being fluid, identities become trapped in the marginalizing rhetoric that initially erected boundary” (Patton 42). Redefining self is very difficult because one comes face to face with an entire system which has already defined identity in which Afro-American women bore the shame of being in unacceptable bodies in addition to the burden of suffering unequal access to education, housing, employment and justice (Craig 24-5). Therefore, African American women’s cultural identity is dependent on how affected they are by the impact of racism and sexism, and how they responded these external factors can be seen on their cultural identity.

1.3. Toni Morrison's Stance on Cultural Identity

Born in 1931 as Chloe Antony Wofford, Toni Morrison acquired her nickname Toni when she was attending Howard University and her surname came when she married a Jamaican architect, Harold Morrison, in 1958. She was born and grew up in Lorain, Ohio where both her mother's and father's families had come from South as a part of Great Migration, a large-scale movement of blacks from rural South to industrial cities of the North from about 1880 to 1920. Therefore, her family experienced the entire historical climate surrounding African Americans and Morrison grew up listening stories as a central element of African culture. Her parents worked hard to send her to college; her father worked two or three jobs at a time and her mother took "humiliating" works. (At that time only domestic work was available to black women such as cleaning houses, being a maid etc.) And she became the first woman to attend college in her family. Morrison started her own family in 1958 and when the marriage ended in 1964 she had two sons. As a single parent, she earned a living working as a publisher's editor and teaching during the day and writing at night. Her family was always central to her life and her heritage is important in her sense of identity, thus, when she won the Nobel Prize in 1993 her first act was to thank God that her mother was still alive to see that historic day (Kubitschek 1-7).

In her novels, Morrison "as a writer with a racial/cultural identity, a gender identity and a national/regional identity" (Kubitschek 13) focuses on the cultural identity of African Americans, especially females, who struggle to establish a self of their own. Toni Morrison asserts that art should have an aim and it should contain politics:

> I think all good art has always been political. None of the best writing, the best thoughts have been anything other than that…Art becomes mere soap-box not because it's too political but because the artist isn't any good at what he is doing. (Black Creation Annual 3)

She has an aim of writing novels and this is keeping her culture alive and helping others to find their identity in this culture which is something lacking in the new generations. Bell Hooks complains about the same problem and as a professor teaching young blacks in the most prestigious universities, she acknowledges that "I was amazed by their lack of self-awareness and understanding, their lack of knowledge of black history and culture, and the profound anxiety and despair that was so pervasive in their lives ("Sisters" 12). Sharing the same complaint Morrison insists that art should be political:

> If anything I do, in the way of writing novels (or whatever I write) isn't about the village or the community or about you, then it is not about anything. I am not interested in indulging myself in some private, closed exercise of my imagination that fulfills only the obligation of my dreams—which is to say yes, the work should be political. It must have that as its thrust…you ought to be able to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful. ("Rootedness" 332)

She emphasize that the political context of the novel is not the reason that would make it bad, it is the artist: a good artist has the capability to write a beautiful political book. She believes that novels are socially responsible and if a novelist has nothing new to say about old themes than she thinks it doesn't need to be written (Jones and Vinson 183).

Morrison tries to achieve these qualities in her novels: she tries to be political and bring a new dimension to old events, and while doing these, she tries to write as beautifully as she can.

According to Morrison America presents African Americans as a counter example to form their own identity, and this process called Africanism is a vehicle by which,

> The American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny. (Morrison, "Playing" 52)

By this way they create the negative image of African Americans while presenting themselves as the positive example. The problem begins when African Americans accept these standards and this causes them to be alienated from their African heritage. The differences between American and African American culture start with this standpoint as Morrison explains:

> I think there are certain things that have come through, rained down on us in America, that don't seem to have happened in Africa. Color—skin color, the privileges of skin in this country are different. I don't mean they don't exist in Africa, they must. Concept of beauty. License, sexual license in this country versus sexual license in African literature. *Enormous* differences in gender, you know: the expectations of one gender of another, what black

> women in America expect of black women, and differences there. (Davis 228)

Most of these differences are made stable by the dominant culture's representation of African Americans. She calls "race talk" to the insertion into daily life of racial signs and symbols which put African Americans at a lower level in the racial hierarchy and she claims that:

> Popular culture, shaped by film, theater, advertising, the press, television and literature, is heavily engaged in race talk. It participates freely in this most enduring and efficient rite of passage into American culture: negative appraisals of the native born black population. (qtd. in Hooks, "Killing" 23)

In her novels, she presents how these representations put beauty myth into the lives of black women and make them accept the external values while damaging their own cultural identity. By demonstrating the daily lives of her characters she reflects the identity of African American women in relation to culture. She states that "There is a great deal of obfuscation and distortion and erasure, so that the presence and the heartbreak of black people has been systematically annihilated in many, many ways and the job of recovery is ours" (qtd. in Jennings 184). She accepts literature to be a part of the recovery process and thus her novels always include political themes about African American past and culture.

Morrison argues that "Deep within the word 'American' is its association with race…American means white, and Africanist people struggle to make the term applicable to themselves with ethnicity and hypen after hypen after hypen" ("Playing"

47). Her feminine characters are the best example of this condition: they try to adopt white values in order to be accepted because they think that they would be loved if they lived according to the American culture they see in their daily lives. As a solution to this problem Morrison tries to present elements from their own culture and show the blankness of chasing beauty myth. With this characteristic Morrison becomes a member of Black feminist thought which helps women to value their own knowledge:

> By taking elements and themes of black women's culture and traditions and infusing them with a new meaning, black feminist thought rearticulates a consciousness that already exists. More important this rearticulated consciousness gives African American women another tool of resistance to all forms of their subordination. (Collins 186)

Patricia Hill Collins emphasizes that within black women communities thought is validated with reference to particular sets of historical and material conditions so living as an African American woman is necessary for producing black feminist thought (196). Their standpoint is unique because they both experience race and gender oppression. With this regard, as an African American, Toni Morrison finds her place in black feminist thought and her novels focus on the lives of black women.

Morrison doesn't present just one type of woman in her novels; she puts all kinds of women from different ages and from different standpoints in the culture. She doesn't show her characters as perfect African American women; she not only creates characters with negative features, faults and sufferings, but also with strong features as she puts it:

> I could write a book in which all the women were brave and wonderful, but it would bore me to death, and I think it would bore everybody else to death. Some women are weak and frail and hopeless, and some women are not. I write about both kinds. (McKay 145)

She takes her characters from real life; therefore, her characters depict both the ones lost in American culture and also the ones connected to their African heritage. However, for both kinds of women building the cultural identity becomes a painful process because of their "triple consciousness." This is why her characters are always living in crisis no matter they are weak or strong: "My characters are always in some huge crisis situation, I push them all the way out as far as they will go, as far as I can" (Koenen 72).

Morrison's women either have fragmented selves or they are the ones helping other characters to put the pieces of their fragmented selves together. At the end of each novel, we see the decision of her characters choosing what they want to become. Therefore, Morrison uses her literature to give the chance of choosing to her readers because today, she asserts, they have the opportunity to represent themselves in Afro-American literature:

> Now that Afro-American artistic presence has been "discovered" actually to exist, now that serious scholarship has moved from silencing the witnesses and erasing their meaningful place in and contribution to American culture, it is no longer acceptable to imagine us and imagine for us. We have always been imagining ourselves. We are not Isak Dinesen's "aspects of nature," nor [Joseph] Conrad's unspeaking. We are the subjects of our own narrative,

> witness to and participants in our own existence, and, in no way coincidentally, in the experience of those with whom we come in contact. We are not, in fact, "other." We are choices. And to read literature by and about us is to choose to examine centers of the self and to have the opportunity to compare these centers with the "raceless" one with which we are, all of us, most familiar. ("Unspeakable" 31-2)

According to Morrison, books can demonstrate what the other culture did while providing a way to see what the dangers are and what is the shelter. She indicates that this is true for every culture but she emphasizes that for African Americans "who have been culturally parochial for a long time, the novel is a transition," and she continues her views asserting that the novel "has to provide the richness of the past as well as suggestions of what the use of it is. I try to create a world in which it is comfortable to do both, to listen to the ancestry and to mark out what might be going on sixty or one hundred years from now" (Ruas 113). In her novels one can see the ancestral features, and also the effects of interaction in forming African American's diasporic culture which demands their struggle to survive as it is stated by Mullings: "The essence of African American culture, and therefore its resilience, lies in our people's continuing struggle for survival, continuity, and liberation" (192). This process makes African Americans transfer elements from Africa and America to form their cultural identity. However, this is more difficult for women in a society experiencing racism and sexism and at the same time their heritage demanding them to be the ones bearing culture. Morrison's novels reflect all this process of women's struggle to create their cultural

identity: some of her characters are the victims of beauty standards, some suffer the duality of African American culture and some assume the role of “culture bearers.” By this way, Morrison not only demonstrates African American women’s quest for identity, but she also helps her readers build their identity by showing them the harms of adopting external standards and shaping her novels with the norms belonging to their cultural heritage.

CHAPTER 2

THE DOMINANT CULTURE'S NEGATIVE EFFECTS ON THE IDENTITY OF MORRISON'S WOMEN

2.1 Women Surrounded By Beauty

Throughout the novels of Toni Morrison it is seen that the concept of beauty and its reflections on both the individual and the environment complicate the quest for self. One of the novels in which this theme becomes dominant is The Bluest Eye. Written in 1970, this novel, explores a black community living in Morrison's own homeland Lorain, Ohio in the 1940s. It is also worth noting that Morrison started writing this story based on a conversation with her friend when she was a little girl:

> The conversation was about whether God existed; she said no I said yes. She explained her reason for knowing that He did not: she had prayed every night for two years for blue eyes and didn't get them, and therefore He did not exist…I began to write a book about…the whole business of what is physical beauty and the pain of that yearning and wanting to be somebody else, and how devastating that was and yet part of all females who were peripheral in other people's lives. (Ruas 95-96)

Putting her experience at the center of the novel, Morrison touches on the destructive effects of accepting white ideals of beauty for African American women.

The Bluest Eye was published when the political movement "black is beautiful" was trying to make African Americans proud of their cultural/racial heritage and, "At a time when the Black Aesthetic movement was calling for positive representations and role models, Morrison created troubled and traumatized characters" (Matus 37). The difference between white realities and African American life creates cultural divisions for African American women, so Morrison uses her traumatized characters to warn black women against the dangers of internalizing the standards of the dominant culture. Morrison wants her readers to re-experience black history and as a way of providing this, she chooses representations of trauma as an attempt to:

> …bring to consciousness what has been repressed and sealed off, both in literary and fictive representation and in historical narrative. Literature then becomes an important means of resurrecting the witness, an important of means of cultural memory. (Matus 30)

Morrison doesn't want her readers to forget how they were affected by the beauty myth of the dominant culture, and she believes that they can only build a strong cultural identity by remembering the past, not repressing it as she argues, "There is a necessity for remembering the horror, but of course there is a necessity for remembering it in a manner in which it can be digested, in a manner in which the memory is not destructive" (Darling 248). As a writer she doesn't repress the painful experiences of her nation, and her novels present a way of remembering the past and digesting it.

The focus of the novel, beauty, is a common subject in literature, art and even in our lives, so grounding the novel on this subject has the risk of repeating a cliché.

However, Morrison is not afraid of using this subject since she believes that a so called cliché may be an important element shaping people's lives, so she doesn't regard beauty as an overwritten concept:

> A good cliché can never be overwritten; it is still mysterious. The concepts of beauty and ugliness are mysterious to me. Many people write about them. In mulling over them, I try to get underneath them and see what they mean, understand the impact they have on what people do. (Tate 159-60)

While telling the story of a black girl yearning for blue eyes, she also questions the reasons behind this desire, and demonstrates the divisions within the self.

The Bluest Eye talks about the black girlhood and the beginnings of identity construction in that era which is ignored by many writers before Morrison, as she asserts: "*The Bluest Eye* in the first place was to write a book about a kind of person that was never in literature anywhere, never taken seriously by anybody—all those peripheral little girls" (Neustadt 88). Then her choice of a twelve year old African American girl as a central character can be regarded a feminist choice since many novels before this haven't considered those girls' lives important to be considered. Through the stories of Pecola Breedlove and Claudia MacTeer, Morrison tries to show the obstacles black girls come across in the early stages of their identity formation, "scrutinizing in the process aspects of commodity and popular culture, pedagogical strategies and the knowledges they produce, and class and labour relations," and she also analyzes "the process of resistance and submission to a hierarchy of values enshrined in American

culture. She does this by exploring the relationship of these girls-becoming women to the culture and commodities that encode the superiority of whiteness" (Matus 38-39).

Like Morrison's friend in childhood, Pecola doesn't think herself sufficient without blue eyes, and the feeling of lack makes her ashamed of herself. This affects the entire process of creating identity as psychologist Gershen Kaufman points out in these words: "The significance of shame lies in its profound impact on personality, psychopathology, and interpersonal relations, as well as its role in minority group relations, minority identity development, national identity development, and international relations" (qtd. in Matus 39). Shame turns her identity into a vulnerable one, and her vulnerability has been exploited by others. Keeping in mind Baldwin's theory that mental disorders occur whenever there is disunity between the African Self Consciousness and the African Self-Extension Orientation, it is clear that Pecola suffers from the Self-Destructive Disorder since upon encountering the brutality and dehumanizing thrust of Western oppression, she struggles to adjust this unnatural condition in a destructive way (Baldwin 187).

Pecola's victimization status becomes clearer when she is faced with the gaze of people. About the importance of the look, feminist and cultural critics argue cultural production's all forms "in a patriarchal, consumer-oriented society focus on the representation of woman as an eroticized, fetishized, and generally commodified object that is displayed for the enjoyment of male 'look' or gaze" Guerrero 27). The complexity of the "look" in African American context comes from the fact that the dominant society constructs whiteness as the norm and stares at African Americans as

the “other”. For female characters this “look” becomes more tragic in the hands of Western beauty standards; therefore, “Morrison is critically aware of how the dominant society’s ideological and commercial apparatus maintains and holds ‘the look’ in place to the detriment of her black characters” (Guerrero 28). In order to be seen one should be beautiful according to the popular American culture. For Pecola, beauty standards materialize in her Shirley Temple cup, and she takes every opportunity to drink milk out of it just to see her sweet face (Morrison, “The Bluest” 16). Since Pecola lacks such kind of visual quality her presence remains unrecognized and “in the eyes of the visually dominated culture, she absents herself from the society by hiding behind the reification of her visual (non)appearance… She hides herself behind the ugliness the mainstream culture won’t look at” (Walther 777). She is disappointed by her invisible existence, and her visual absence makes her desire to totally disappear:

> “Please, God,” she whispered into the palm of her hand. “Please make me disappear.” She squeezed her eyes shut. Little parts of her body faded away. Now slowly, now with a rush. Slowly again. Her fingers went, one by one; then her arms disappeared all the way to the elbow. Her feet now. Yes, that was good. The legs all at once. It was hardest above the thighs. She had to be real still and pull. Her stomach would not go. But finally it, too, went away. Then her chest, her neck. The face was hard, too. Almost done, almost. Only her tight, tight eyes were left. They were always left. (Morrison, “The Bluest” 33)

She wants to disappear so much that she imagines and even feels all the process of disappearing, but no matter how hard she tries, she cannot manage to get rid of her eyes. "Try as she might, she could never get her eyes to disappear. So what was the point? They were everything. Everything was there, in them. All those pictures, all those faces" (33-34). Her eyes keep every painful memory she lives, so clearing them off means clearing off her memory which makes the process hard for her: she can neither change the things she sees nor how she is seen by others. Therefore, she assumes that if she changes her eyes which hold everything she experiences, she can change her life: "if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different (34). Basing her identity on false assumptions, every night she starts to pray for blue eyes. She is so naïve that she assumes changing the eye color will change the reality, and then she will have a different life in which she will be treated kindly.

Pecola's desire for blue eyes increases with her experience in the grocery store where her speech with Mr. Yacobowski, the owner of the grocery store, becomes a psychological turning point for her. Mr. Yacobowski seems to be disturbed by her presence and when he looks toward her,

> Somewhere between retina and object, between vision and view, his eyes draw back, hesitate and hover. At some fixed point in time and space he senses that he need not waste the effort of a glance. He does not see her, because for him there is nothing to see…She looks at him and sees the vacuum where curiosity ought to lodge. And something more. The total absence of human recognition—the glazed separateness. (36)

Pecola realizes that her blackness creates this separateness, so she identifies herself with dandelions which are regarded by people as ugly seeds. She starts to believe that her ugliness makes her invisible in the eyes of other people, and this makes her self esteem fade away. Even the chose of Pecola in the grocery store, Mary Jane candies, shows how distorted her self-esteem is. On the wrapper of the each candy there is a picture of little Mary Jane smiling with her blond hair and blue eyes, so for her, "to eat the candy is somewhat to eat the eyes, eat Mary Jane. Love Mary Jane. Be Mary Jane" (Morrison, "The Bluest" 38). The dominant American culture, which Pauline sees in the "looks" of people, makes her dream of being Mary Jane, being one of the little American girls, and then she assumes she will be looked and loved.

The negative effect of the "look" and thus American culture can also be seen in Pecola's mother Pauline Breedlove. When Cholly, Pecola's father, and Pauline moves into Ohio from her hometown Kentucky, disagreements between them start to emerge. First reason of this start stems from the looks of other black women towards Pauline who doesn't straighten her hair, and the women find this weird. Because as we have seen in Chapter 1, at that time hair straightening was very popular, and it was a way of adopting the beauty standards of America. Social pressure of the dominant culture starts to change her life when she realizes the "looks" of others on her. Jean Paul Sartre acknowledges that "one's reality and identity are both confirmed and threatened by the look of the Other" (qtd. in Bjork 44), and in this case Pauline feels threatened by the external world looking for the "beauty myth" in her. The gaze of the others threatens her cultural identity, and this forces her to internalize the dominant standards to be accepted.

In order to get rid of their looks she wants to change her appearance by at least buying new clothes:

> When Cholly began to quarrel about the money she wanted she decided to go to work. Taking jobs as a day worker helped with the clothes, and even a few things for the apartment, but it did not help with Cholly. He was not pleased with her purchases and began to tell her so. Their marriage was shredded with quarrels…Money became the focus of all their discussions, hers for clothes, his for drink. The sad thing was that Pauline did not really care for clothes or makeup. She merely wanted other women to cast favorable glances her way. (Morrison "The Bluest" 92)

Pauline starts shopping just to make herself normal in terms of the dominant culture which would stop the judging looks of others. In a way we can say that Pauline accepts the values of American culture just to feel safe, and the only way is following the American consumer culture.

Like her mother, Pecola is destroyed by the values of white standards, and not meeting these standards creates the feeling of shame in her. "If anger helps to maintain distinctions between what belongs to the self and what must be kept outside it, shame disturbs those distinctions by distorting responsibility and encouraging self-blame" (Matus 45). Rather than the external forces, one blames the self and becomes ashamed of herself for racial devaluations. On the other hand anger gives strength as Morrison states, "Anger is better. There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. An awareness of worth" ("The Bluest" 37-38).Whereas the dominant feeling constructing

Pecola's identity is shame, Claudia is angry more than being shamed, and her anger "directed outward, protects her sense of self" (Matus 44). Whereas shame makes its subjects silent about the pain, anger becomes a way of disposing the pain and this way one can heal her wounds as Bell Hooks asserts: "Only as African Americans break with the culture of shame that has demanded that we be silent about our pain will we be able to engage wholistic strategies for healing that will break the cycle" ("Killing" 144). Claudia's anger breaks her silence and becomes a way of healing because her anger turns out to be a resistance to the dominant culture's indoctrination of what is beautiful and worthy. Claudia rejects the external standards of beauty which are impossible for her to meet with the help of her anger. Anger is such a dominant factor for her that just at the beginning of the novel Morrison introduces Claudia's anger against Rosemary Villanuscci, their next-door friend who is sitting in her father's car, eating bread and telling that they cannot come in. By telling them they cannot enter the car Rosemary draws the line between the black and white girls, and this drags Claudia into anger:

> We stare at her, wanting her bread, but more than that wanting to poke the arrogance out of her eyes and smash the pride of ownership that curls her chewing mouth. When she comes out of the car we will beat her up, make red marks on her white skin. (Morrison, "The Bluest" 5)

Also, when Maureen Peal, a schoolmate of the girls, shout at them that she is cute and they are not, Claudia begins to question what was lacking in them that made them ugly, and comes to realize that "Maureen Peal was not the Enemy and not worthy of such intense hatred. The *Thing* to fear was the *Thing* that made *her* beautiful, and not us"

(58). Since shame doesn't bind up her eyes Claudia is able to see that it is not the beauty she should be afraid, she is aware that there is something else shaping these beauty standards.

In the Christmas, the gift all the girls want is a blue-eyed Baby Doll, however, Claudia doesn't share the same feeling with the other girls. She declares:

> I had only one desire: to dismember it. To see of what it was made, to discover the dearness, to find the beauty, the desirability that had escaped me, but apparently only me. Adults, other girls, shops magazines, newspapers, window signs—all the world had agreed that a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll was what every girl child treasured. "Here," they said, "this is beautiful, and if you are on this day 'worthy' you may have it." I fingered the face, wondering at the single-stoke eyebrows; picked at the pearly teeth stuck like two piano keys between red bowline lips. Traced the turned-up nose, poked the glassy blue eyeballs, twisted the yellow hair. I could not love it. But I could examine it to see what it was that all the world said was lovable. (14)

Her rejection of the white doll is important because according to a case study performed by Kenneth and Mamie Clark, who worked in kinder gardens in 1940 and 1941, 253 black children were asked to choose between a beige and brown doll. 60 percent of the children identified the white doll as nice and the other as ugly (Craig 38). Experiencing the same trauma with these girls, at the age of nine, Claudia is not capable of understanding the Western standards of beauty, so in order to understand the hidden

reason of what makes them beautiful she destroys the white baby doll, and starts to feel the same hatred against white girls as she questions: “What made people look at them and say, ‘Awwwww,’ but not for me?” (15). Later, with the help of her anger she realizes that beauty is created, and she should be worried of its creator, not the creation. Anger makes her character stronger and this feature differentiates her from the other girls in the book.

Moreover, Claudia doesn’t share the other girls’ role models as beauty symbols. Despite Pecola and Frieda who adore Shirley Temple, an iconic American child actress of the 1930, Claudia doesn’t like her not because she is beautiful but because she dances with Bill “Bojangles” Robinson, who is a black American top dancer. She cannot accept this fact because in her mind as a black person he should have danced with her, not with “one of those white girls whose socks never slid down under their heels” (13). For this reason she prefers Jane Withers, who is another American child film star, to Shirley Temple. Since she doesn’t have any role models present in media she prefers the one who is at least not dancing with Bojangles, but later she declares her “hatred for all the Shirley Temples of the world” (13). Claudia feels that she needs a role model and chooses the one which doesn’t hurt her feelings—she doesn’t choose Shirley Temple because she hurts her by taking someone which should have belonged to her. Then, Claudia chooses a role model from the available ones, who are also in white standards, but she quits her decision after awhile, and starts to deny all the beauty symbols of the white world.

At that time in America, the African American female figure was not depicted in mass media and the few depicted ones were negative whose,

> features are distorted by excessive make-up, a greasy type substance is used on her lips in order to make them look thicker than they are; she wears a wig and dresses in garments that cause her to seem slightly overweight…Without the distortions she is a healthy, attractive looking woman in no way resembles white people's negative stereotype of black women. (Hooks, "Ain't I" 65)

In the novel the references to icons of white beauty such as Shirley Temple, Betty Grable, Heddy Lamar and Claudette Colbert are used in a way that they imply the devaluation of black subjects in American culture. On one hand there are positive images of beautiful white women, and on the other hand there are negative images of black women which affect especially the psyche of African American girls as Bell Hooks puts in these words:

> Negative images of black women in television and film are not simply impresses upon the psyches of white males, they affect all Americans. Black mothers and fathers constantly complain that television lowers the self-confidence and self-esteem of black girls. Even on television commercials the black female child is rarely visible—largely because sexist-racist Americans tend to see the black male as the representative of the black race. So commercials and advertisements in magazines may portray a white female

> and male but feel that it is enough to have a black male to represent black people. (Hooks, “Ain’t I” 65)

During the teen years, regardless of race, girls are engaged in the issue of beauty but this process becomes easier for white girls who have role models available. Unable to find role models, black girls, as it is seen in the novel, find their self-esteem distorted.

Like Claudia, Pecola feels anger at first; however, this doesn’t last long, and her shame pervades the anger again. The difference between Pecola and Claudia lies behind this fact: both of them experience the same process of devaluation; however, while Claudia’s anger empowers her and makes her reject the external standards, Pecola feels shame which makes her hide behind her blackness and internalize the external standards. The result is an entirely damaged self esteem for Pecola. Her distorted self esteem leads her to go to Soaphead Church, who is a fake magician deceiving people, and wants him to turn her eyes into blue. He knows he cannot help her, but he tells her to give meat (secretly poisoned) to the dog which he wanted to kill. He tells her that if the dog reacts, her wish will be granted. Pecola does the thing he asked, the dog dies and she runs away thinking her wish is accepted. Soaphed gives her an illusion of what she asked and he calls it a miracle: “I have caused a miracle. I gave her the eyes. I gave her the blue, blue, two blue eyes. Cobalt blue…No one else will see her blue eyes. But *she* will. And she will live happily forever” (144). Pecola prefers this illusion to reality which causes her mentally break down. Hooks explains this process of creating a false identity in this way:

> Cultivating the art of dissimulation has also created an over-valuation of "appearance" in black life. So much so that black children are often raised to believe that it is more important how things seem than the way they really are. If illusions are valued more than reality, and black children are taught how to skillfully create them even as they are simultaneously deprived of the means to face reality, they are being socialized to feel comfortable, at ease, only in situations where lying is taking place. These psychic conditions lay the groundwork for mental stress, for mental illness. ("Sisters" 24)

Since Pecola doesn't like the reality, she creates a lie for herself where she has the bluest eyes. This lie starts to consume her day by day and in the end it turns out to be a mental illness. She believes that she has blue eyes and looks at other people to see that the others are aware of the beauty of her blue eyes. Since she cannot change the looks of people with her imaginary blue eyes, she also creates an imaginary friend. By this way, she acknowledges being seen and being beautiful with the help of a hallucinated self which demonstrates her acceptance of the culture's racism:

> African Americans' acceptance of their culture's racism is the clearest example of culture to shape an individual's consciousness…Morrison's Pecola Breedlove believes that she will become more beautiful and less deserving of the outcast condition if she acquires blue eyes, conventional attributes of Anglo-American beauty. Instead of renouncing the white-dominated culture that tells them they are unworthy, these characters hope for acceptance within it. (Eichelberger 8)

Pecola is dragged into a false beauty myth which surrounds her entirely. The dominant American culture doesn't give any way out for her and for other African American females. Michele Wallace puts this problem in these words:

> The black woman had not failed to be aware of America's standard of beauty nor the fact that she was not included in it; television and motion pictures had made this information very available to her. She watched as America expanded its ideal to include Irish, Italian, Jewish, even Oriental and Indian women. America had room among its beauty contestants for buxom Mae West, the bug eyes of Bette Davis, the masculinity of Joan Crawford, but the black woman was only allowed entry if her hair was straight, her skin light, and her features European; in other words, if she was as nearly indistinguishable from a white woman as possible. (qtd. in Patton 26)

African American beauty norms were different from the white beauty standards because African Americans have derived their cultural views from their African heritage. To illustrate; whereas Western culture accepts thinner bodies to be more attractive, in African American communities "fat women were viewed as attractive, smart, sexy, employed, wanted by men, able to attract husbands" (Webb et al. 372). In Tar Baby, for example; Morrison gives such kind of an authentic beauty, a woman in yellow dress, whom Jadine sees in the grocery store and everybody there cannot take their eyes from her. Morrison presents her as a woman having true blackness, and depicts her as having too much hip and too much bust which reminds us the original beauty standards of African women where large body is respected and "physical deviance among Black

women has been closely tied to perceptions of their emotional and spiritual strength" (Beauboeuf 112). In African American culture actually men found large hips attractive and large size brought authority of sorts whereas few skinny women were perceived as capable of directing the lives of others (Harris 8-9).However, in time it is seen that African American men's perception of beauty starts to change with the influence of the dominant culture which may cause "African American women to redefine their culture's traditional definition of body figure attractiveness and adopt one that is consistent with the dominant/mainstream media's perception of body figure attractiveness" (Webb et al. 382). Consequently, the dominance of American culture leads to the distortion of African American women's cultural identity.

Living in a society distorted by the dominant culture's values, Pecola cannot achieve to learn the beauty norms of the real African American culture. Therefore, she builds her cultural identity according to the white culture which doesn't even see her presence. The dominant culture's values are so internalized by African Americans that they form a caste system within themselves where the darkest is the ugliest. Growing up with these values black girls internalize these standards from an early age as Hooks asserts: "The tragic consequences of color-caste hierarchy are evident among the very young who are striving to construct positive identity and healthy self-esteem. Black parents testify that black children learn early to devalue their skin" ("Outlaw" 180). Not only the black children devalue their skin, but also their fathers and mothers force them into this situation. In Song of Solomon, Ruth emphasizes this fact by telling Milkman the fact about her father "He delivered both your sisters himself and each time all he was

interested was the color of their skin" (Morrison, "Song" 71). Ruth and his father have a lighter skin compared to others; since Ruth's husband has a darker skin he is afraid that his granddaughters will have dark skin. In The Bluest Eye, also, Geraldine has such kind of a character; she thinks that her lighter "sugar brown" (64) skin puts her in a higher position and looks down on other blacks denying her African background. She makes a distinction between colored people and niggers, and explains this distinction to her son: "Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud. He belonged to the former group: he wore white shirts and blue trousers; his hair was cut as close to his scalp as possible to avoid any suggestion of wool" (68). Geraldine puts Pecola into nigger category and when she looks at Pecola she feels disgust:

> She had seen this girl all of her life…Hair uncombed, dresses falling apart, shoes untied and caked with dirt. They had stared at her with great uncomprehending eyes. Eyes that questioned nothing and asked everything…The end of the world lay in their eyes, and the beginning, and all the waste in between. (71-2)

Pecola looks at this "pretty milk brown lady" with admiration but in turn she finds hatred in her eyes. The dominant culture is so prominent that the ugliness of Pecola is both accepted by white society and her own society. For both groups Pecola becomes a way of securing their own status. Morrison criticizes this fact with Claudia's words: "We were so beautiful when we stood aside her ugliness. Her simplicity decorated us, her pain made us glow with health, her awkwardness made us think we had a sense of humor" (Morrison, "The Bluest" 163). Pecola is used as a means of protecting the

identity of others while her own identity is being shattered. She makes others seem beautiful because the assumptions about her ugliness make them feel beautiful compared to Pecola. Consequently, Pecola's idea of true self is de-centered because she and her community look at her through the eyes of a white culture. Then, the novel argues that Pecola is destroyed because "she accepts the values of the white community as (inadequately) filtered through the black community" which in turn makes her self esteem insufficient (Tirrell 13). The novel also presents Claudia who rejects those values and, "grows up healthy and strong, and who tries, through the telling of Pecola's story, to understand herself, her community, and most of all, why she survived and Pecola did not" (Tirrell 13).

2.2 The Connection between Love and Beauty

In Morrison's novels we can see female characters that are forming their identities according to the presence or absence of love. Bell Hooks points out that "Black women deserve care, respect, and ongoing affirmation" (Hooks, "Sisters" 40), because the conditions they live in makes them feel insufficient, and they can only feel complete with the feeling of being loved. This love manifests itself in three forms, each affirming one's self-love in turn: community's love, family's love and beloved's love. If the female character lacks one of these types of love, then she starts to have a negative relationship with her environment and herself. What's interesting is if we analyze the three novels of Morrison, The Bluest Eye, Song of Solomon and Tar Baby we realize that the female characters associate lack of love with lack of beauty. The characters look for love because in this way they can feel accepted and in turn they can love themselves. On the other hand, if they can not achieve the love they are looking for, their self esteem gets damaged, and they accuse their physical deficiencies as the source of their lack of love.

In The Bluest Eye, Pecola lacks the love of community and her family, and her assumption that this stems from her ugliness triggers the mental problems for her. The novel not only presents the beauty standards she lacks, but also the ideal American family she cannot achieve. The novel opens with a prologue describing a classic white house consisting of Mother, Father, and their children Dick and Jane, and the dog and cat:

> Here is the house. It is green and white. It had a red door. It is very pretty. Here is the family. Mother, Father, Dick, and Jane live in the green-white house. They are very happy. See Jane. She has a red dress. She wants to play. Who will play with Jane? See the cat. It goes meow-meow. Come and play. Come play with Jane. The kitten will not play. See mother. Mother is very nice. Mother, will you play with Jane? Mother laughs. Laugh, Mother, laugher. See Father. He is big and strong. Father, will you play with Jane. Father is smiling. Smile father smile. See the dog. Bowwow goes the dog. Do you want to play with Jane? See the dog run. Run, dog, run. Look, look. Here comes a friend. The friend with play with Jane. They will play a good game. Play, Jane, play. (1)

This story "comes from primers, books used to teach children to read during 1940s and 1950s in the United States and Canada" (Kubischek 32). It appears three times in the novel: the first one is written with standard punctuation, the second one is written with smaller spaces between the words and there is no punctuation, and in the third one there is no space between the words and all the words run together without punctuation. Thus, "The breakdown of order in the language of the story suggests the breakdown of order in Pecola's mind" (Kubitschek 32). Most probably in school, learning to read with this story, Pecola idealizes this as a normal family portrait; however, she doesn't experience such kind of a relationship in her family. Everything she experiences is totally in contrast with the primer: their house is a poorly furnished storefront where the only living thing is the coal stove; they are never happy and her mother never smiles,

distorted by the standards she sees in the movies even when Pecola is a baby girl Pauline thinks that she is ugly; her father never laughs at her and even abuses her; the cat in the novel claws her and the dog is the one she has to kill to have the blue eyes she wants.

Living in a total contradiction with the primer, she thinks that it is all because of the beauty myth that she cannot achieve. Therefore, slowly breaking down the language of the primer written three times consecutively and a small part of it written before each chapter of the novel, Morrison demonstrates Pecola's mental break down which parallels her realization that she is "ugly." Lacking a loving family and hating herself she accepts the idealized beauty and accuses her ugliness for the situation of her family as she assumes: "If she looked different, beautiful, maybe Cholly would be different, and Mrs. Breedlove too. Maybe they'd say, 'Why, look at pretty-eyed Pecola. We mustn't do bad things in front of those pretty eyes'" (Morrison, "The Bluest" 34).

In an interview with Jane Bakerman Morrison asserts that her basic theme is the same "which is how people relate to one another and miss it and hang on to it…or are tenacious about love. About love and how to survive—not making a living—but hoe to survive *whole* in a world where we are all of us, in some measure, *victims* of *something*" (41). The denial of identity caused by not meeting the standards of the dominant culture creates self-hatred among African Americans: not being loved and at the same time not loving themselves distort the lives of those people. O'Shea Jackson, an African American rapper known as Ice Cube, criticizes this fact in these words:

> It's hard to be black in America. Look at all that images that run across us, from television, school, just everything in general. It's hard. You got to really

> fight to love yourself. They put everything into such a bad light…So when we look in the mirror, we changin' our hair, we changin' our eyes, try to change our features, try to not be black…We end up loving whites more than loving ourselves. (Hooks, "Outlaw" 127-28)

As Ice Cube points out, surrounded by these images Pecola starts to love whites, more than herself, and she wants to look like them by having blue eyes.

Actually what Pecola and other girls in the novel need is attention and love. Morrison is aware of this need and the community's role of providing it as she asserts: "we can love her in the light as well as in the darkness, quiet her frenzy toward perfection and encourage her attentions toward fulfillment" (qtd. in Hooks, "Sisters 19). However, love is lacking in the families of The Bluest Eye. When Claudia complains that adults only tell them what to do (5), she simply summarizes the parent child relationship they have: in a culture of domination adults assume that they have the right to rule the child. It is like a master-slave relationship and the reason for this may be the black parents' assumption that they need to prepare their child to a hostile white dominated society (Hooks, "Sisters" 36). However, this kind of a relationship is not healthy for black children because compassion is missing. There is no one to make Pecola feel her beauty. As a counter example from real life, we can illustrate W.E.B Du Bois' compassionate speech to his daughter warning her against the insults he feared she would encounter at school: "You will meet curious little annoyances. People will wonder at your dear brown and the sweet crinkley hair. You must know that brown is as pretty as white or prettier and crinkley hair as straight even though it is harder to comb"

(Craig 78). Such kind of a speech done by her parents would have totally changed Pecola's life. Unfortunately, what she has a loveless community and family which is the cause of all her pains. This is why she asks Claudia a question neither of them can answer, "How do you do that? I mean, how do you get somebody to love you?" (23). She wants to be accepted and to be loved, but she assumes beauty to be the prerequisite for these because of the cultural dominations of white society which imposes beauty to be a key factor of love. Building her own cultural identity on these assumptions, she becomes a victim of beauty culture and her status as a victim is strengthened by her silence throughout the novel. "For, in many homes, the silence that is demanded of the young girl child becomes the speech of the young girl child" (Davies 22).

Pecola's silence throughout the novel strengthens her victim status and her silence is indeed full of meaning. The novel's first sentences also focus on silence: "Quiet as it's kept, there were no marigolds in the fall of 1941" (4). The sentence is very simple as Morrison asserts in her essay "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," however, she declares that these simple words have some larger meanings: "It was a familiar phrase familiar to me as a child listening to adults; to black women conversing with one another; telling a story, an anecdote, gossip about someone or event within the circle, the family, the neighborhood" (43). By this way, before starting a terrible story no one would like to hear, Morrison also warns her readers that she is about to speak about an unspeakable thing. Also, Morrison's expression of marigolds' absence in the beginning of the novel and her division of each chapter with a season's name demonstrates that the nature governs the novel and suggests that environment is the supreme power governing

the fate of the individual (Tirrell 14-15). In Pecola's situation, the absence of her environment's love shapes her life entirely.

Although none of the children's households resemble the lives of the children in Dick and Jane story, Pecola's situation is worse than Claudia. Claudia sometimes wishes her parents to be more affectionate and complains that her mother often shouts at her. To illustrate, her mother gets angry when she gets sick but her love for Claudia lies behind her anger as she realizes later: "my mother is not angry with me, but at my sickness. I believe she despises my weakness for letting the sickness to 'take holt'" (7). Her mother loves her, wants her to be strong and gets worried when Claudia gets sick but the difficult conditions they live in sometimes prevent her parents to be as affectionate as Claudia wants. Despite she wants more love, in fact she is conscious that she is loved in this house: "Love, thick and dark as Alaga syrup, eased up into that cracked window. I could smell it—taste it—sweet, musty, with an edge of wintergreen in its base—everywhere in that house" (7). While the environment Claudia lives in encourages her, Pecola's environment fastens her mental disorder. The readers can feel that Claudia's family loves her, however, Pecola's family not only resists loving Pecola, but they also don't love themselves. Then the problem of Pecola starts with her family who believe that they are ugly:

> You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear, and they had each

> accepted it without question. The master had said, "You are ugly people." They had looked about themselves and saw nothing to contradict the statement; saw, in fact, support for it leaning at them from every billboard every movie, every glance. "Yes," they had said. "You are right." And they took the ugliness in their hands, threw it as a mantle over them, and went about the world with it. (Morrison, "The Bluest" 28)

They internalize the external standards which make absolute damages on their psyches, and in turn this affects their relationships with Pecola and themselves.

In a typical morning Pauline tries to wake her drunken husband to get coal and light the stove. Cholly's nervous answer turns into a violent argument between Pauline and Cholly, which Pecola listens in her bed, and Cholly starts beating Pauline who is also kicking him. The narrator expresses this fact in a way that we understand these quarrels are a daily ritual for Breedlove family. Hooks explains that the violence can be a product of capitalist patriarchy that "encourages men to see themselves as privileged while daily stripping them of their humanity in de-humanizing work, and as a consequence men use violence against women to restore their lost sense of power and masculinity" (Hooks, Ain't I 105-6). As a victim of a racist society Cholly doesn't have a regular job and suffers from his past; lacking self-worth, both Pauline and Cholly carry the violence, experienced outside, into their home. Living in this atmosphere Pecola's character becomes more fragile, neither can she escape this loveless home, nor make herself disappear.

In the context of African culture Pauline should have behaved in a different way than in the novel because according to African American tradition it's women's task to provide a homeplace:

> This task of making homeplace was not simply a matter of black women providing service; it was about the construction of a safe place where black people could affirm one another and by so doing heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination. We could not learn to love or respect ourselves in the culture of white supremacy, on the outside; it was there on the inside, in that "homeplace," most often created and kept by women, that we had the opportunity to grow and develop, to nurture our spirits. (Hooks, "Yearning" 42)

Pauline doesn't fulfill her role which is a part of her culture; rather the dominant culture distorts her identity by presenting a world which is alien to her. This becomes clear when she quits work and starts to go to movies because of her pregnancy to Pecola, and the movies become an escape for her from the real life: "The onliest time I be happy was when I was in the picture show. Everytime I got, I went. I'd go early, before the show started. They'd cut off the lights, and everything be black. Then the screen would light up, I'd move right on in them pictures" (95). In this screen, she sees a dreamy life and there she is introduced to romantic love and physical beauty: "She was never able, after her education in the movies, to look at a face and not assign it some category in the scale of absolute beauty, and the scale was one she absorbed in full from the silver screen" (95). The dominant standards enter into her life disturbing her identity. Moreover, she

starts to identify herself with movie stars which cause her to deny her actual body as Guerrero points out: “It is this ‘look’ that Hollywood always try to efface from the consciousness of the spectator so that one may identify with one’s ‘ideal ego image’ in the story world and deeply submerge into the films verisimilitude” (30). Since she learns Western culture in the movies, she wants to look like the women she sees in the movies and she tries to adopt the life in screen into her own life which ends up with failure:

> White men taking such good care of they women, and they all dressed up in big clean houses with the bathtubs right in the same room with the toilet. Them pictures give me a lot of pleasure, but it made coming home hard, and looking at Cholly hard. I ‘member one time I went to see Clark Gable and Jean Harlow. I fixed up my hair up like I’d seen hers on magazine. A part on the side, with one little curl on my forehead. It looked just like her. Well, almost just like. Anyway, I sat in that show with my hair done up that way and had a good time. I thought I’d see it through to the end again and I taken a bit of that candy, and it pulled a tooth right out of my mouth…There I was, five years pregnant, trying to look like Jean Harlow, and a front tooth gone. (Morrison, “The Bluest” 96)

As we can see, American standards shown in movies create an illusion for Pauline that causes her to reject her actual body and try to be someone else. Pauline already has a vulnerable identity because when she is a small child she acquires a permanent limp which sets her apart from society, and her self-esteem is ready to be hurt by every little detail. After this incident which causes her to lose her tooth, she starts to

fight with Cholly constantly, and she doesn't care how she looks since with the birth of two children she takes the responsibility as the breadwinner. One of the reasons of her anger toward Cholly stems from the fact that the romantic love and the perfect houses she has seen in the movies are not applicable to her life. Living in poverty she cannot also achieve the "idealized femininity" that is shown in the movies, so she stops caring for her own family and looks for these standards which would make her happy outside the home. She works in the house of Fishers' where she finds "beauty, order, cleanliness and praise" (Morrison, "The Bluest" 99). Whereas Pecola calls Pauline "Mrs. Breedlove" in stead of "mother, there, she even has a nickname "Polly" which helps her create an illusion for herself. She keeps the order in the house for herself, her private life because she feels fulfillment when she is there, and then she stops keeping her own house. She likes the daughter of white people she's working for more than her own children. When Claudia and Frieda follow Pecola to her mother's workplace and Pecola accidentally smashes a fresh baked berry cobbler on the kitchen floor and burns herself, Pauline chooses to comfort the white child frightened rather than dealing with Pecola. She even knocks Pecola to the floor and when the white girl asks "Who were they?" (85), she doesn't answer; she cannot tell her that they are her daughter and her friends.

It can be said that the "doubleness" of African American culture as W.E.B. Du Bois calls it, results in deformation of the African American family since African culture is destroyed by the racist approach of American culture (Mullings 78). The Breedlove family internalizes the dominant culture's values and this let them suppress their own African values. Living in a family without being loved, Pecola thinks it's her ugliness

that creates this loveless home, and thus her cultural identity starts to be grounded on false assumptions. Morrison tells this story in order to show the effects of a loveless community, and the name of the family, Breedlove, just serves as an irony since the last thing the family breeds is love.

In Song of Solomon, Hagar also shares Pecola's desire to have a white conception of beauty; however, the cause of her desire is different from Pecola: whereas Pecola wants to be accepted by society and loved by her family, Hagar's desire is to achieve the love of Milkman, her beloved. At the age of twelve Milkman falls in love with her, who is sixteen, and they start to be together when he is seventeen and she is twenty-two. Then when she is thirty six he calls her:

> The third beer. Not the first one, which throat receives with almost tearful gratitude; nor the second, that confirms and extends the pleasure of the first. But the third, the one you drink because it's there, because it can't hurt, and because what the difference does it make? (91).

Then he decides to end the relationship with a letter ending "Also, I want to thank you. Thank you for all you have meant to me. For making me happy all those years. I am signing this letter with love, but of course more than that, with gratitude" (99). He signs the letter with love but emphasizes that his gratitude is more than his love. This declaration becomes a turning point for Hagar because Milkman takes away the love Hagar needed to construct her identity, and she loses her self-esteem day by day.

When Hagar sees Milkman with a girl who has "silky copper hair" (127), she thinks that the reason he left is her own hair "standing out from her head like a

thundercloud" (128). This realization puts her in a more difficult situation because she cannot compete with silky hair which is a part of the beauty myth. Hair is the central figure of female beauty and it "becomes such a major preoccupation for adolescent girls of both races that their self esteem can actually rise and fall with every glance in the mirror" (Patton 37). The hair of the girl she saw with Milkman has the characteristics of the idealized beauty, so every glance into the mirror makes her internalize the dominant culture. Morrison recognizes that "under patriarchy the female gaze into the mirror confirms a sense of lack of self-negation. For through the workings of narcissism and exhibitionism the mirror gaze entraps woman as the displayed object of male desire" (Guerrero 35). Pilate gives her a small plastic compact with gold trim just to make her happy since she is not since Milkman left. However the mirror in it grasps her into an alien standard of beauty, and she thinks that the reason of Milkman's leave is her lack of the qualities of this standard: "Look at how I look. I look awful. No wonder he didn't want me I look terrible" (Morrison, "Song" 308). Hagar thinks that she can make him come back by transforming herself into a physically attractive woman.

> Thus Hagar rejects the 'natural' self that she finds reflected there, the self shaped by the traditions and lifestyles of her grandmother Pilate and mother Reba, both of whom represent Nature in the novel and energetically work against the allure of outward appearances and the colonizing powers of 'the look.' (Guerrero 36)

Since Hagar assumes that the reason Milkman left her is her ugliness, she wants to change it with the consumer system which also demonstrates how beauty standards

are used as an apparatus for the modern capitalist development. With the money from Reba's diamond, $200, Hagar dashes from store to store purchasing "a Playtex garter belt, Miller No Color hose, Fruit of the Loom panties, and two nylon slips—one white, one pink—one pair of Joyce Fancy Free and one of Con Frio" (310). She also buys new dresses and cosmetics to raise her natural appearance in the hands of the consumer system as Guerrero puts it:

> It is precisely because woman in the consumer system bears the burden of sexual and gender-focused exploitation that Hagar rushes off to obtain a mad list of commodities and beauty treatments in order to transform herself into the objectified spectacle worthy of male attention and romance. (36)

She cannot achieve this transformation and in a tragic way on her way home she is caught in a thunderstorm which damages all her purchases. Nevertheless, she runs into her bedroom without drying herself and her dresses, puts on make up and she creates a false illusion of herself thinking that she is beautiful that way. She presents herself to Reba and Pilate, "And it was in their eyes that she saw what she had not seen in the mirror: the wet ripped hose, the soiled white dress, the sticky, lumpy face powder, the streaked rouge, and wild wet shoals of hair" (Morrison, "Song" 314). In their eyes she sees her ruined attempts to be beautiful, although Reba and Pilate try hard to raise her self confidence, Hagar collapses psychologically and physically with the disappointment of not achieving the transformation she looked for which brings along self-hatred and death.

Lying in her bad with fever Hagar asks Pilate "Why don't he like my hair?" (315). In addition to its symbol as female beauty, hair is far more important for African American women whose hair is also a symbol of racial authenticity and African American female identity. Therefore, "for Milkman to love Hagar's hair is to love himself and his racial heritage" (Walther 782). This is why Pilate answers her question in these words:

> How can he not love your hair? It is the same hair that grows out of his own armpits…It grows out of his nose, over his lips, and if he ever lost his razor it would grow all over his face. It's all over his head, Hagar. It's his hair too…How can he love himself and hate your hair? (315)

Of course every woman who changes the shape of her hair doesn't mean being ashamed of her own identity, it may be just an attempt to try a new look: "It's possible to dye your brown tresses platinum and still love your Blackness" (qtd. Patton 29). However, this is not the situation Hagar is in. She wants to change her appearance in order to be accepted by Milkman whom she fancies as loving "silky hair…penny colored hair…and lemon-colored skin…and gray-blue eyes…and thin nose" (315-16). Desiring to have these white beauty characteristics, she also wants to change her hair and goes to a beauty shop. "Beauty shops always had curtains or shades up. Barbershops didn't. The women didn't want anybody on the street to be able to see them getting their hair done. They were ashamed" (Morrison, "Song" 62). Here Morrison makes it clear that racist and sexist approach of the American culture damages women's identity more than men. Women go into the beauty shops with curtains, to change their appearance without

showing it: they want to give the impression that their natural hair is like the ones done in beauty shops. Falling in this trap, Hagar also starts to be ashamed of her hair. Milkman's refusal of loving her leads Hagar's refusal of her culture and she assumes that she can take his love back by adopting into the American culture.

Hagar's obsession with Milkman's love stems from her need for self approval. Guitar tries to explain Hagar what is wrong with her love as he says "You're turning over your whole love to him. Your whole life, girl. And if it means so little to you that you can just give it away, hand it to him, then why should it mean any more to him? He can't value you more than you value yourself" (306). Hagar loses control over her own identity which is now dependent on Milkman's attention and love. "Being love is fine" as Naylor declares, "but only when there's a self there who's doing the loving" (196). However, in Hagar's case, "Totally taken by her anaconda love, she had no self left, no fears, no wants, no intelligence that was her own" (Morrison , "Song" 137). Like Hagar, Milkman's mother Ruth is also dependent on Milkman, she loves her in a selfish way and she sees him as a triumph over her husband who has tried to stop her pregnancy. Although Ruth doesn't like her husband, she never leaves him as she wants to protect her lifestyle; she is dependent on him for his money. Hagar, on the other hand, is dependent on Milkman for his love which can only make her survive.

In contrast to Hagar and Ruth, Morrison projects Pilate as an admirable female role model who is not dependent on anyone. She doesn't define her identity according to the love of a man nor does she need any other person's approval. She is aware that her granddaughter is breaking down mentally but she cannot do anything to save her

granddaughter once she internalizes a standard of beauty that makes her ugly. This is important because, it shows the dangerous side of internalizing standards which do not belong to you. In front of the coffin of Hagar, Pilate declares “And she was loved” (319). Unfortunately, Hagar bounds her need for recognition in American culture to Milkman’s love, and she cannot realize Pilate’s love can save her as she saved Milkman in the end. Turning her back to her African culture, she tries to find a place in the dominant one, and she finds herself trapped in the consumer culture. Even the consumer system cannot be a cure for her “ugliness,” so she gives up and accepts death.

In Tar Baby Alma Estee, the daughter of Therese and Gideon, is also perverted by American consumer culture. She asks Son to buy her a wig from America and shows him the picture of it because she wants to suppress her identity. When he forgets to buy it, she purchases one for herself. By covering her African hair she assumes that she will find a new identity. In her red wig she looks like “a bougainvillea in a girdle, a baby jaguar with lipstick on, like an avocado with earrings” (Tar Baby 299). However, unaware of her appearance, she feels safer with her wig, so she doesn’t let Son wear off her wig, and she reacts aggressively when he tries to take it. In order to be accepted by the community, she tries to conceal her racial and cultural identity, and she falls back on consuming like Hagar. By showing the desperate situation she is in, Morrison criticizes American standards of beauty and consumer values while demonstrating how African American women embrace them since they find it as a solution to attain the love they needed in any form.

By Pecola's example, Morrison also highlights the obstacles African American girls meet at an early stage of their cultural identity. In order to attain the love of their community, they are faced with the danger of internalizing the cultural values of the white society. Pecola's tragic experience is presented to show a way of healing the wounds of the sexist and racist discrimination African American women experience. Remembering it is the first step as Judith Herman explains, "Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for healing of individual victims" (qtd. in Matus 25). It is important to transform the traumatic experiences into narrative because while traumatic memory repeats itself unconsciously, narrative memory narrates the past as past. In order to heal the wounds, Morrison chooses to write these traumatic experiences, and in her novel the narrator Claudia can also form a healthy identity by observing and telling the tragic story of Pecola: "Pecola's story is an African American female tragedy. But her story is told by strong surviving voices that are also African American and female, the voices of Claudia MacTeer and Toni Morrison" (Kubischek 42). Then we can say that African American females who do not suppress their pain stemming from racism and sexism, can build a strong cultural identity and the others try to conceal their pain while concealing their cultural identity.

CHAPTER 3

"WHOSE CULTURE ARE YOU BEARING?"

3.1. Women as "Culture Bearers"

> When I talked to a very young black girl recently, it seemed to me that she had never heard of anything. They're grown up like they never had grandmothers. Or if they had them, they never paid any attention. Kill your ancestors, you kill all. There's no future, there is no past, there is just an intolerable present. And it's intolerable under the circumstances, it's not even life (Koenen 73).

The sentences above belong to Toni Morrison who depicts her thoughts on the role of ancestors in forming self consciousness, and she criticizes the fact that young women are not aware of their cultural identity. Her complaint about the erasure of cultural consciousness and the "cultural illness" which this erasure precipitates leads her to concentrate on the cultural identity of her characters in her novels (Ryan 64).

Distortions in African self consciousness can be very dangerous and they can even cause disorders in personality as we have seen in the characters of Pecola, Hagar and Alma Estee. Therefore, Baldwin emphasizes the importance of reestablishing the natural relationship between the African Self-Extension Orientation and African Self-Consciousness and he continues: "These frustrated natural tendencies in the Black personality long to be reunited and appropriate intervention measures are necessary to reinstitute this natural union of oneness in nature" (190). One way of reestablishing this

kind of relationship is forming race consciousness with the help of the ancestor figure in African American culture. In her essay "Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation" Morrison emphasizes the importance of the ancestral figure in achieving cultural integrity:

> What stuck me in looking at some contemporary fiction was that whether the novel took place in the city or in the country, the presence or absence of that figure determined the success or the happiness of the character. It was the absence of an ancestor that was frightening, that was threatening, and it caused huge destruction and disarray in the work itself…These ancestors are not just parents, they are sort of timeless people whose relationship to the characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom. (qtd. in Paquet 184)

In African tradition it is generally women's duty to undertake the role of ancestors and be the providers of cultural heritage. Women are seen as the guardians of the nation and national culture (Mullings 140). Wilentz also emphasizes that "Within an African context, the role of woman has been that of educator of the children into culture" (Wilentz 114).

Morrison lives in such kind of a family which keeps this culture alive. In her life, introducing cultural roots to her is carried out by certain women:

> Her immediate models are first, her grandmother who, in the early part of this century, left her home in the South with seven children and thirty dollars because she feared white sexual violence against her maturing daughters; and

second, her mother who took 'humiliating jobs' in order to send Morrison money regularly while she was in collage and graduate school. (McKay 138)

These women shape her life and help her construct her cultural identity as she tells, "My life seems to be dominated by information about black woman. They were the culture bearers, and they told us (children) what to do" (McKay 140). Morrison thinks that a woman has a responsibility to her heritage and having been raised with this tradition, in her books she wants to continue the tradition of women as "culture bearers" by attempting "to transform Eurocentric cultural discourse through the acceptance of African heritage, told by generations of women storytellers" (Wilentz 110).

In her novels, Morrison either shows the development of characters that have such kind of an ancestor or highlights the destruction of characters in the absence of this figure. In The Bluest Eye, for example, such kind of an ancestral figure helping the new generation constructing their identity is missing. The girls in the novel are not only ignored by the white world but also by their own society. Just in the beginning of the novel Morrison underlines this fact with the help of Claudia who complains about the lack of compassion:

> Adults do not talk to us—they give us directions. They issue orders without providing information. When we trip and fall down they glance at us; if we cut or bruise ourselves, they ask us are we crazy. When we catch colds, they shake their heads in disgust at our lack of consideration…Our illness is treated with contempt, foul Black Draught, and castor oil that blunts our minds (5-6).

Lack of a culture bearing ancestor providing racial and cultural consciousness for the girls in the novel, creates problems in their identity construction, it even causes disorders as we have analyzed. However it is important to keep in mind that in The Bluest Eye, what prevents Pauline from fulfilling her role as culture bearer is her internalization of mainstream cultural standards. She cannot save her daughter and educate her into culture because she already accepted this culture and is distorted by it.

Contrary to The Bluest Eye, in Song of Solomon Morrison presents the model of ancestors who are culture bearers at the same time. The presence of ancestor figure in African American culture is important because the ancestor helps the new generation form a connection to the past, in a way educates them as Phillips asserts:

> African Americans cannot erase history of slavery, but they can reduce its impact on their lives through education…Education—formal or informal—is seen as a means to advance the community. Resistance is culture specific and sustained by subordinate groups through the establishment of normative behavior and a counter ideology. Among African Americans collectivism and mutuality are integral factors in uplifting community members. (Phillips 28)

Pilate has such kind of a role throughout Song of Solomon (1977) in her relationships with Milkman and Hagar. She represents continuity with African past, and tries to create a cultural and racial consciousness for the forthcoming generation assuming the role of ancestor. Morrison creates this character as a model for African American women and when she is questioned of which woman in her novels have the potential of being an ideal woman she answers: “The woman that is most exciting, I suppose, is Pilate, only

because she has a kind of ferocity, that's very pointed, astute, and she is also very generous and wide spirited; she has fairness, and braveness, you know, in a way I'd like to be" (Koenen 69).

Song of Solomon starts with the birth of Milkman around 1932 and continues until 1963, his thirtieth birthday, but there are also flashbacks to the lives of older characters like Pilate, Milkman's aunt, and Macon, Milkman's father, so the novel gives hints about a long time period. Although Morrison seems to concentrate on Milkman's quest for identity and not sharing what Pilate is feeling or thinking, Pilate's presence is felt throughout the novel. Morrison explains the reason why she keeps Pilate quite as her capability of taking the book over: "To prevent that, the writer has to exercise some kind of control. Pilate in *Song of Solomon* was that kind of character. She was a very large character and loomed very large in the book. So I wouldn't let her say too much" (McKay 143). Pilate is a very powerful character, even in her silence she can tell everyone what to do. Morrison shows that that Pilate's great strength comes from African-American cultural traditions. Although Pilate experiences the same disadvantages with his brother Macon who doesn't have a connection to his cultural heritage, she is the one who can stay connected to her family's forgotten past, and this demonstrates the role of women as "culture bearers" in society. For this reason, "The ways of Pilate, who could fly without leaving the ground, are an inspiration for Milkman" (Matus 84).

Like all the other children in the family, except the firstborn sons, Pilate's name is picked blindly from the Bible by her father. Pilate's mother dies as she gives birth to

her so the midwife, Circe, doesn't want this name to be given to the girl because the name refers to the Roman governor who ordered the crucifixion of Jesus. However, her father insists on this name and puts back the paper her name written into the Bible where it stays, "until the baby girl turned twelve and took it out, folded it up into a tiny knot and put it in a little box, and strung the entire contraption through her left earlobe" (Morrison, "Song" 19). The way Pilate carries it on her ear shows her desire to have control over her name, and this situation emphasizes her status as an ancestor of cultural roots which she carries wherever she goes. By this way she also continues a forgotten African cultural tradition which Davies mentions in these words: "Deliberate self-marking as is seen in African scarifications, one thesis holds, was engaged in during the period of slave trafficking, in order to inscribe ethnic identities on faces and bodies" (139). In this regard, Pilate marks her identity by carrying her name on her ear and also makes it public to make people see it.

Pilate disappears when his brother Macon Dead is sixteen years old, then a year before the birth of Macon's son Milkman she comes "into the city as she owned it" (Morrison, "Song" 125). Macon is ashamed of her because of her uncared appearance, so he dismisses her out of the house which she never comes back, but this doesn't stop him look at her house whenever he passes by. There is something in her that makes all people be curious about her. One of the reasons for this might be the fact that she is born without a navel:

> It was the absence of a navel that convinced people that she had not come into this world through normal channels, had never lain, floated, or grown in

> some warm and liquid place connected by a tissue-thin tube to a reliable source of human nourishment. (Morrison, “Song” 27-28)

At the age of twelve Milkman meets Guitar and he introduces her to Pilate whom his father had forbidden him to go near, however, the moment he sees her “Milkman knew that what with the earring, the orange, the angled black cloth, nothing—not the wisdom of his father nor the caution of the world—could stop him from her” (Morrison, “Song” 36). Pilate is a free standing and self-confident woman whose characteristics surprise Milkman:

> She was the one who was ugly, dirty, poor and drunk. The queer aunt whom his sixth-grade schoolmates teased him about and whom he hated because he felt personally responsible for her ugliness, her poverty, her dirt, and wine. Instead she was making fun of his school, of his teachers, of him. And while she looked as poor as everyone said she was, something was missing from her eyes that should have confirmed it. Nor was she dirty; unkempt, yes, but not dirty. And unless he knew absolutely nothing, this woman was definitely not drunk. Of course she was anything but pretty, yet he knew he could have watched her all day. (Morrison, “Song” 38)

Macon, who is a slumlord obsessed with accumulating wealth, doesn’t want his son to be in touch with her because he wants him to be like himself: he wants him to continue the job he does and follow his steps but seeing Pilate changes Milkman’s vision completely:

> At fifty-two, Macon Dead was as imposing a man as he had been at forty-two, when Milkman thought he was the biggest thing in the world. Bigger even than the house they lived in. But today he had seen a woman who was just as tall and who had made him feel tall too. (50)

From this moment, Milkman accepts Pilate as the ancestral figure in his life. He rejects his father's empty materialism and regards Pilate as the provider of his self discovery. When he is talking to Guitar about it, he shows that he accepts Pilate's sense of identity which she carries hung from her ear because he knows that Pilate would be the one leading him to his cultural heritage: "It's in that dumb-ass box hanging from her ear. Her own name and everybody else's. Bet mine's there too. I'm gonna ask her what my name is" (89).

In Morrison's view, history is never over, never simply in the past. Its repercussions and traumatic consequences generate the effects of the present and continue to shape it (Matus 17-18). This is why Milkman wants to find his roots and Pilates makes him search his culture. Pilate witnesses her father being shot to death by white neighbors who covet his prosperity, and this trauma pervading her life shapes also her identity. Pilate, at the age of twelve and Macon sixteen find themselves homeless. They see the ghost of their father often, and once seeing it in a cave, they enter the cave and there Macon murders old white man who is staying there, too because he gets afraid of him. Macon and Pilate fight since Pilate doesn't agree on taking the gold that the old man had, and this becomes the place where their ways split up. Three days later when Macon enters the cave he finds the green tarpaulin and gold has disappeared with Pilate.

Upon talking about it with Milkman, Macon assumes that the green sack, which Pilate calls as her "inheritance", hanging from the ceiling of her house is full of the dead man's gold. However, stealing it, Guitar and Milkman see that the sack contains rocks and a human skeleton.

Actually, Pilate turn outs to be the woman she is, when her father dies and she finds herself wondering from one place to another. She takes a rock from every state she lives because she believes that living there makes it hers and these are the rocks in the green sack. In these years she realizes that the lack of navel isolates her from the people and then she questions:

> What her situation in the world was and would probably always be…and began at zero. First off, she cut her hair. That was one thing she didn't want to have to think anymore. Then she tackled the problem of trying to decide how she wanted to live and what was valuable to her…Throughout this fresh, if common, pursuit of knowledge, one conviction crowned her efforts: since death had no terrors for her (she spoke often to the dead), she knew there was nothing to fear…She stared at other people, and in those days looking straight into another person's eyes was considered among black people the height of rudeness, an act acceptable only with and among children and certain kinds of outlaws—but she never made an impolite observation…She laughed but never smiled and in 1963, when she was sixty-eight years old she had not shed a tear since Circe brought her cherry jam for breakfast. (Morrison, "Song" 149)

Pilate consciously chooses to become the person she wants to be, and it is important that before beginning her new life she cuts her hair. Morrison emphasizes that one cannot achieve her cultural identity without rejecting the norms of external society. By doing so she becomes empowered, and then she can look at the others' eyes to understand if they can see the things she sees. Also, Bjork explains that "In contemporary novels, black female characters look to themselves, to their relationships, and to their communities for strength and growth" (28). Therefore, Pilate's stares to the others may be interpreted by her looking for more strength through making connection to her cultural heritage, which she shares with these people, but it's clear that she cannot see cultural identity in some of the people she looks.

According to most African cultures the concept of ancestor is very important and Morrison continues this tradition by creating ancestral characters. In Toni Morrison and the Idea of Africa, Jennings mentions this tradition and asserts that

> Morrison conflates the office of the living-dead ancestor with the living elder, converging and diverging their ontological boundaries to create a hybrid, an "ancestral presence" that mediates the two socio-religious roles at the apex of eldership. The ancestor and the living elder act as a unity (10).

Then Pilate is the living elder and the ancestral presence in the novel giving advice to Milkman, and Pilate's dead father Jake assumes the role of the living-dead who instructs Pilate beyond the veil of afterworld (Jennings 85-6).

In their childhoods Pilate and Macon experience the same events but their ways are totally different; while Pilate doesn't lose her connection to past, Macon holds

strictly to the present. For this reason, Pilate becomes the leading figure in Milkman's life. Even when Milkman and Guitar get caught by the police with the bones in the sack, it is again Pilate that comes to his help and saves him for one more time. She doesn't mind Milkman stealing her "heritage" and helps him which shows that she still has hopes on him. Acting like an ignorant woman in front of the white policemen she tells that the bones belong to her dead husband whom she couldn't bury because of poverty. She acts in a way that even her size seems to be small but when they get out of the police station "Pilate was tall again…And her own voice was back" (208). When they get out of the station, she tells Macon that three years after the murder she went back and brought the bones with her as her father told "You just can't fly on off and leave a body" (208). Pilate believes that life is precious in any case, "And the dead you kill is yours. They stay with you anyway, in your mind. So it's a better thing, a more better thing to have the bones right there with you wherever you go. That way, it frees up your mind" (208). While Macon runs away from his history and just cares about the gold, Pilate takes the bones as she takes the responsibility of the past. Morrison implies that you cannot get away from your history no matter how hard you try, so it's better to learn living with it as Pilate does.

As Pilate becomes an ancestral figure for Milkman, when she is twelve Circe, the midwife who was there when she got her name, has occupied the same position for Pilate. Circe shares her name with a witch in Homer's *Odyssey,* and magically links the generations of characters as she not only helps Milkman but also Pilate to make a connection with their roots (Jennings 160). First of all, she hides Pilate and Macon from

the murderers of her dad and gives them a place to stay. Moreover, she helps Pilate to pierce her ear and stop the bleeding, so that she can carry her name on her ear. And, then she, also, helps Milkman finding his roots when he comes to Pittsburgh in search of the treasure and he tells the real names of his parents which are Jake and Sing. There, with the company of his new friends for the first time in his life he feels walking the earth, "walking as he belonged to it" (281).

When Pilate was a child, Circe was already old and she is still alive when Milkman finds her living in the house of Butlers whom she worked for so long. This situation turns her into a supernatural character, which is a common theme in African oral literature. Moreover, she is depicted as a natural healer because she cures Pilate's bleeding ear.The fact that she is so old, makes us think whether she is still alive occupying the position of living elder or she is dead leading new generations as a living dead. No matter which position she holds, it is clear that Morrison uses her as an ancestral presence guiding Pilate and Milkman.

After Milkman's visit to Virginia it is understood that the bones actually turn out to be Pilate's own fathers'. As Circe told the rain had floated the corpse of him up out of the grave and the hunters brought the corpse to the caves where Pilate and Macon stayed. Milkman finds out that the old man Macon killed was not even dead which explains why the gold was gone. Learning this, Pilate decides to bury the bones so they go to Virginia together. Pilate also puts her snuff-box earring into the grave; all this time she has carried it with her because it provided sustenance for her and for next generations. It reminded her who she was, and thus she could help Milkman learn who

he is, too. When she sees Milkman knows the story of their ancestors she feels that she no longer needs to carry it with her physically. It was a part of her identity which she bequeaths to Milkman, it is now his turn to protect their cultural identity and as a reminder of it Pilate gives Milkman a box of Hagar's hair. Its meaning is the same with Pilate's earring: accepting the cultural identity and history. Pilate achieves this by carrying her name on her ear and makes Milkman achieve it by carrying Hagar's hair.

Even with her death Pilate continues her role as a "culture bearer" since she becomes the one who sacrifices herself for the sake of preserving the ancestral roots which will go on with Milkman. Guitar tries to kill Milkman but by mistake he kills Pilate whose physical death is not the end of her existence. The birds circling over Pilate's dead body, and one of them taking Pilate's snuffbox up to the sky strengthens her position as an ancestral figure and this indicates that her name will live on. Even while she is dying Pilate reveals her demand to help other people find their cultural heritage, and she addresses the source of this wish as love: "I wish I'd a knowed more people. I would of loved 'em all. If I'd a knowed more, I would a loved more" (336). Since she loves her race, her people she can help them, and she can guide them to their ancestral roots.

Pilate is the one who leads Milkman to find his roots, his identity because she loves Milkman and she loves her past no matter how sad it is. Since she regards her past as a part of her, she doesn't forget it and she carries it with her. Also by singing folk songs about Sugarman's flight, she manages to remember her ancestors. With the help of

her, Milkman's search for gold turns into a greater search for his cultural identity. By this way:

> Morrison questions the imposed values and perceptions of the dominant culture and begins to offer alternative cultural knowledge and belief based on black Americans' African traditions and heritage. Also revealing is the folk song of Sugarman/Solomon's flying away, sung by Pilate at Milkman's birth. The song is the key to Milkman's birth. The song is a key to Milkman's quest and illustrates the function of the African American woman in passing on stories to future generations. (Wilentz 112-113)

Morrison gives importance to the presence of the ancestor in African American Literature because she wants her readers to remember African culture in which there is always an elder, "And these ancestors are not just parents, they are sort of timeless people whose relationships to the characters are benevolent, instructive, and protective, and they provide a certain kind of wisdom" ("Rootedness" 330). While keeping alive the ancestor figure in African American culture, she also reminds African American women being "culture bearers" is a part of their cultural identity.

3.2. Cultures Confronted

Many African Americans adopt a European self-consciousness superimposed upon them while distorting their natural African self-consciousness. The impact of losing touch with ancestral memories may result in some negative circumstances and Baldwin refers to this situation as "psychological misorientation" which is an incorrect orientation to reality:

> It appears functionally normal within the framework of European cosmology because, among other things, all of the social cues and institutional systems throughout Western society reinforce the European survival thrust only. Thus, African Americans who think, feel, and act like Europeans are defined as 'normal' and healthy by European cosmology. These African Americans experience no overt anxiety or confusion over their identity or their normalcy because all social institutional processes in American society reinforce such pathology in Black people. (189)

In this case Jadine Childs, the protagonist of Tar Baby, is the exact example of such kind of a person, and Morrison depicts her as suffering from the Anti-Self Disorder in Baldwin's terms because she is negative towards anything African and she "feels quite comfortable with its alien identification and usually epitomizes normal healthy functioning as defined by European cosmology" (Baldwin 187). In a way, Jadine suffers from the inherent duality of African American culture.

Tar Baby (1981) is set in a French colonial island which "functions as a place where histories are confronted" (Matus 92). Valerian Street buys a house in there to

retire to it from Philadelphia and for four years he doesn't return to the United States. Both the island and Jadine's body represent the same dominant colonized fantasy as Judith Williamson points out, "Woman is an island because she is mysterious, distant, and a place to take a holiday; but she is also an island within ideology—surrounded and isolated, as the colony is by the colonizer, held intact as the 'Other' within a sea of sameness" (qtd. in Guerrero 38). Like an island, Jadine is surrounded by an alien culture but this alien culture is not American, she is alienated from her African heritage, and thus approaches it as the "other" while feeling secure in American values.

This novel includes different members of black diaspora, and we realize that there is not only the problem of black-white disagreement, the members of the same race also experience conflicts:

> All the African Americans condescend to the inhabitants of the Caribbean island, they in turn great them with suspicion and dislike. Indexing the complex play of power between different members of black diaspora, the realist representation of these fractious encounters destabilizes common assumptions about black unity and racial identity. (Goyal 49)

Jadine's aunt Ondine Childs and Ondine's husband Sydney Childs look down on their Caribbean helpers Gideon and Therese although they all work for their white patron Valerian Street: Gideon as a yardman, Therese as Ondine's helper, Ondine as the cook and Sydney as the butler. Ondine and Sydney do not even bother to learn their names; they call "Yardman" to Gideon and "Mary" to Therese. On the other hand, Therese and Gideon call them "Americans," which demonstrate that their African heritage doesn't

prevent them from behaving each other in a negative way. Even when Valerian fires them Ondine and Sdyney don't feel sorry for the fact that they lost their jobs, they feel sorry because Valerian haven't ask them their opinion as Sydney tells Valerian: "I just think we should have been informed. We would let them go ourselves, probably" ("Tar" 204). This shows the ambiguity of their situation: under Valerian, over Therese and Gideon in social rank.

Although Jadine seems to be a self-confident woman, she has also complicated feelings about her social and racial position but hers is different than Ondine's and Sydney's concerns. Ondine and Sydney have been parenting Jadine from the age of twelve, but she never lived with them after college except summers at Valerian's house. Her education is paid by Valerian but her position in the house is not the same with Ondine and Sydney; she eats her meal with Streets and has a close relationship with them; however, she doesn't feel comfortable with the idea of giving a present to their son for Christmas:

> "Should she? Should the—what—social secretary buy a present for the son of her emperor/patron? She could exchange gifts with the Streets because she had known them so long, and they were like family, almost, and given her so much. But she wasn't sure if giving a gift to their son was not a presumption. If she married to Ryk (coat and all) it would be all right. Her status would be unquestioned. But like this? (Morrison, "Tar" 90)

She identifies Ryk, her white boyfriend, with the fur coat he has bought for her which demonstrates her desire to strengthen her social position and getting married to him may provide this, as she thinks.

Jadine has anything to endanger her self esteem but her self esteem endangers her cultural identity. Since she thinks she has everything necessary in her life she loses connection to her roots. She is a beautiful light skinned black model whose face "made those white girls disappear. Just disappear right of the page" (40) as Ondine calls it, she is proud of her beauty as if it's a victory. However, her beauty alienating her from her culture is not authentic; Morrison uses her beauty to reflect the white standards of beauty that black women internalize:

> Her nickname (as is typical of Morrison's characters) reflects this: 'copper Venus'. Jadine's beauty thus parallels that of a Roman goddess, with dark skin tacked on, as if that made no difference. This image presupposes a universal standard of female beauty which is actually based on white criteria. Presumably if Jadine were to reflect Morrison's idea of authentic black beauty, her nickname would have been Kali, or that of another black goddess. (Walther 784)

Jadine suffers from discomforting dreams and in one of her dreams she is surrounded by several women hats which "is a figurative formulation of her identity confusion, suggesting that she does not know what kind of woman she is; that is, she does not know what hat she is wearing" (Matus 95). When she wakes up from this dream, she cannot sleep again and remembers a day in Paris when she went shopping for

a party she organized celebrating her appearance on the cover of Elle magazine and her academic achievements. In the grocery store she walks in a self-confident manner thinking everything on the list would be there but seeing the beautiful black woman what she calls a vision turns everything upside down for her:

> And when the vision materialized in a yellow dress Jadine was not sure it was not all part of her list…The vision itself was a woman much too tall. Under her long canary yellow dress Jadine knew there was too much hip, too much bust. The agency would laugh her out of the lobby, so why was she and everyone else in the store transfixed? The height? The skin like tar against the canary dress? The woman walked down the aisle as though her many colored sandals were pressing gold tracks on the floor. Two upside-down V's were scored into each of her cheeks, her hair was wrapped in a gelée as yellow as her dress. The people in the aisles watched her without embarrassment, with full glances instead of sly ones. Jadine her chart around and went back down the aisle telling herself she wanted to reexamine the vegetables…She looked up then and they saw something in her eyes so powerful it had burnt away the eyelashes. (45)

Just before leaving the store, the woman stops, turns her head, looks directly at Jadine and spits on the ground. Thinking about this incident makes Jadine uncomfortable because she was the woman whose:

> Items on her shopping list were always there. The handsome raucous men wanted to marry, live with, support, fund and promote her. Smart and

> beautiful women wanted to be her friend, confidante, lover, neighbor, guest, playmate, host, servant, student or simply near. (Morrison, "Tar" 47)

Until she saw the woman, she thought that she had everything, but when she sees her, she starts to question herself because she wants the woman to respect her.

The woman in yellow without saying a word in the novel leaves a very strong effect behind her because "she is a real, a complete individual who owns herself—another kind of Pilate" (McKay 147). This is what is missing in Jadine, seeing her starts a dilemma in her, so she feels uncomfortable as Morrison asserts:

> It is when she sees the woman in yellow that she feels inauthentic. That is what she runs away from…She is the original self—the self that we betray when we lie, the one that is always there. And whatever that self looks like—if one ever sees that thing or that image—one measure one's other self against it. So that with all the good luck, and the good fortune, and the skill that Jadine has—the other is the authentic self. (McKay 147-48)

Although she respects the woman for her true blackness and authentic self, she doesn't want to be objectified as a black woman by her environment. The woman appears at a time when she is about to make a decision on marriage, but she starts to question whether Ryk really wants to get married to her or a black girl whom he finds exotic. She is not only confused about herself but also how others perceive her. She thinks that she cannot meet the expectations of him if he wants to marry her for her skin color, because she is not like other black women: she doesn't like jazz or any cultural forms related to blackness. She knows that she should embody the qualities of the woman in the yellow

dress because she rejected her by spitting on ground as Jadine doesn't represent true blackness. On the other hand, she is not interested in her African heritage and she doesn't want to be objectified as a black woman. This is why she declares "sometimes I want to get out of my skin and be only the person inside—not American—not black—just me" (Morrison, "Tar" 48). While everything was alright, seeing the woman in red dress exposes the questions she has repressed for all the time, then she starts to question her identity and runs away because "Ryk is white and the woman spit at her" (48).

During one of her chats with Valerian, Jadine reveals that Valerian's son Michael, whom she saw for a couple of times, accused her of abandoning her racial roots by studying art history in college. She also confesses that his criticism bothered her a while, and she felt ashamed of preferring European culture over African or African American cultures: "I knew the life I was leaving. It wasn't like what he thought: all grits and natural grace. But he did make me want to apologize for what I was doing, what I felt. For liking 'Ave Maria' better than gospel music, I suppose" (Morrison "Tar" 74). Jadine knows that she is black, but the fact that she is black doesn't mean accepting black culture to her:

> Jadine resists notions of essential blackness—just because you are black does not mean you automatically love Mingus and have to straighten your hair. Morrison represents her nevertheless as a predictable type—the sophisticated model, the art student who prefers Picasso to the Ithumba masks, who is almost obscenely turned on by a coat made by clubbed baby seals, who fears her sexuality and vulnerability and needs to be in control. (Matus 100)

As we have seen in Chapter 1, because of the effects of the cultural bomb in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's terms she views her past "as one wasteland of non-achievement" (3). Therefore, she accepts Euro-American cultural forms.

Son, who arrives in the island as a fugitive, sneaks into their house and becomes Valerian's guest, at last, also questions the identity of Jadine whom he regards as a white girl (121). When Jadine tells him that he smells bad, Son replies that she smells too: "There is something in you to be smelled which I discovered and smelled myself. And no sealskin coat or million-dollar earrings can disguise it" (125). He means that she cannot disguise her blackness no matter how hard she tries to act like a white girl. Son's presence is very important in the novel because he emerges as a counter-identity for Jadine. Mullings asserts that "gender is not just about women; it is about the social relationship between men and women and the dialectical, reciprocal, and cultural construction of femininity and masculinity" (136-37). Therefore, in this part while concentrating on the elements shaping Jadine's self, we will also touch on Son who is used by Morrison to check Jadine's perception of cultural identity.

Both Son and the woman in the yellow dress symbolize true blackness to Jadine who admires it, however, doesn't want to be a part of it because she wants to "belong to herself" (118). She wants to be authentically black but at the same time she wants to be valued for her own self and not just for her race. So, when she feels that she is attracted to Son she books a ticket back to New York after the Christmas, and then she can "return to Paris and Ryk" (159) which is another attempt to disguise her identity.

When Son and Jadine are talking about their homelands, Jadine gives three places, “Baltimore. Philadelphia. Paris.” (173) which show her lack of sense of home. Bell Hooks discusses that it stems from one’s alienation from her cultural roots:

> Indeed the very meaning of “home” changes with experience of decolonization, of radicalization. At times, home is nowhere. At times, one knows extreme estrangement and alienation. Then home is no longer just one place. It is locations. Home is that place which enables and promotes varied and everchanging perspectives, a place where one discovers new ways of seeing reality, frontiers of difference. (Hooks, “Yearning” 148)

Between blackness and whiteness, she doesn’t feel attracted to one place more than the other which complicates her process of identity formation.

On their way home from a picnic with Son, they run out of gas and Son goes to fill a bottle. Meanwhile, Jadine walks towards the trees where the soil is swampy, and walking too much she sinks into a tar point. Morrison uses this scene to emphasize the impact of nature on characters. She struggles to get out of it while swamp women seem to watch her from the trees,

> The women looked down from the rafters of the trees and stopped murmuring. They were delighted when first they saw her, thinking a runaway child had been restored to them. But upon looking closer they saw differently. This girl was fighting to get away from them. The women hanging from trees, were quiet now, but arrogant—mindful as were they of their value, their exceptional femaleness…they wondered at girl’s desperate

> struggle down below to be free, to be something other than they were. (Morrison "Tar" 183)

Here the swamp women symbolize nature and the swamp she is in is the true blackness from which she tries to escape, and the women's anger stems from Jadine's ignorance of her cultural past. Morrison implies that Jadine should have the qualities of authentic blackness; it is natural. However she resists nature by trying to get out of it so this scene may be interpreted as Jadine's symbolic reluctance to blacken herself (Matus 99). Finally, she succeeds to get out of it but the effect of the nature is clear on her after this incident. When she returns home, Margaret's behaviors enrages her. Margaret thinks that Son wants to rape her, and the idea that he would prefer a white woman makes her angry:

> She was jealous of Margaret of all people. Just because he was in his closet, she thought his sole purpose in life was to seduce her. Naturally her. A white woman no matter how old, how flabby, how totally sexless, believed it and she could have shot him for choosing Margaret's closet and giving her reason to believe it was true. (187)

This thought surprises Jadine because before she was negative towards Son but now she is lying in her bed and competing with Margaret over rape.

After the fight at the Chrismas meal between Streets, and Childs', which starts over Valerian's firing Therese and Gideon. Jadine and Son decide to meet in New York where Son feels alienated from the black people, "black people in white face playing

black people in blackface" (216). Moreover, Son realizes the distorted identities of black women in New York the very first minute he goes there and he expresses:

> The Black girls in New York City were crying…crying girls split into two parts by their tight jeans, screaming at the top of their high, high heels, straining against the pull of their braids and the fluorescent combs holding their hair. Oh, their mouths were heavy with plum lipstick and their eyebrows were a thin gay line, but nothing could stop their crying… (215)

Son criticizes the assimilation of black girls into American culture, and he doesn't like New York. He doesn't realize that Jadine is one of them, too. Contrary to Son, Jadine is happy to be in there as she declares "This is home…not Paris, not Baltimore, not Philadelphia…if ever there was a woman's town, New York was it…And now she would take it; take it and give it to Son. They would do it theirs" (222). Because of her alienation stemming from the "cultural illness" Jadine is always in search of a place where she can call "home" and each time defines her identity according to the place she accepts home. Davies expresses one reason of this as follows:

> Migration and the fluidity of movement which it suggests or the displacement and uprootedness which is often its result, is intrinsic to New World experience, fundamental to the meaning of the (African) diaspora…Migration and exile are fundamental to human experience. And each movement demands another definition and redefinition of one's identity. (128)

This time when she comes to New York, she really feels that New York is her home, and she also wants to impose it to Son, however, he insists on his own hometown, Eloe where Morrison presents a more authentic setting. Jadine has the opportunity of learning about her cultural heritage there but she doesn't attempt to do, so. Moreover, she feels totally uncomfortable there whereas Son is happy to be with his people, so their cultural differences become clear.

Jadine cannot stay the night in the same place with Son in Eloe because they are not married, therefore; one night she leaves the door open so that Son would come, he comes, and when they fall asleep she imagines that all of the women in Son's life and her life, even the woman in yellow dress, sneak into the room and start watching her: "All of them revealing their both their breasts except the woman in yellow. She did something more shocking—she stretched out a long arm and showed Jadine her three big eggs" (259). This time more women appear and they seem even angrier than the swamp women. The women showing their breasts and the woman in yellow with eggs in her hand symbolize the mothering and "culture bearer" role of women. They want Jadine to accept her role and her blackness as she interprets the vision:

> The night women were not merely against her, not merely looking superior over their sagging breasts and folded stomachs, they seemed somehow in agreement with each other about her, and were all out to get her. Grab the person she had worked hard to become and choke it off with their soft loose tits. (262)

The fact that their breast are “sagging” hints that they have been giving milk and we know that breast-feeding is a reference to motherhood, maternal identification and nurturing (Davies 142). Condemning her lifestyle, the women want to turn her into a true nurturing woman who is the one giving birth to black race, who is one of them. However, this is not who she wants to become; she wants to create her own identity, so she rejects this attempt and leaves Eloe.

In New York, Jadine and Son start to fight frequently. Jadine wants Son to get education so that he can be saved from his ignorance and turn out to be like Jadine which Son opposes harshly arguing,

> The truth is that whatever you learned in those colleges that didn’t include me…If they didn’t teach you that, then they didn’t teach you nothing, because until you know about me, you don’t know nothing about yourself. And you don’t know anything, anything at all about your children and anything at all about your mama and papa. (Morrison, “Tar” 264-65)

It is true that Jadine is constructed by Western standards with regard to the original story of tar baby. But the problem with that is not she is educated in that way. Morrison emphasizes that there is nothing wrong with getting Western education as she addresses: “No Black woman should apologize for being educated or anything else. The problem is not paying attention to the ancient properties—which for me means the ability to be ‘the ship’ and ‘the safe harbor’ ” (Wilson 135). Morrison means that women are capable of nurturing and transferring the culture for generations (being the safe harbour), and also improving herself and providing financially (being the ship) (Kubitschek 5). Therefore,

Son's criticism on her education just shows Son's strict devotion to his ancestral roots and his denial of every part of American culture. His rejection of education is not appropriate since Morrison asserts that one can be educated and related to the ancestral roots at the same time. On the other hand, the problem with Jadine is her unwillingness to learn her African cultural identity. If we need an answer to the question summarizing the tension between Jadine and Son: "Culture bearing black woman whose culture are you bearing?" (Morrison, "Tar" 269), then the answer is exactly Western culture for Jadine. She is not interested in the past, so she forms her cultural identity according to the culture which she lives in. Stuart Hall also acknowledges that cultural identity is not limited to the past:

> Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. (Hall 52)

In terms of this view Jadine is right to adopt some parts of Western culture because of the transformation mentioned above. Her problem is totally denying her cultural roots as if history was never experienced; she doesn't have a past to consult for direction which will help her to combine Black culture with American culture whereas Son is fixed in the past denying transformation. As a continuous process they should harmonize the African heritage with Euro-American culture, however, Jadine wants to pursue future in her own way which is shaped according to the European standards. Therefore, she rejects her role as "culture bearer" by accepting only the Western culture.

The problems between Son and Jadine doesn't stem from the gender conflict, their problem is the confrontation of two cultures which makes them try to impose his/her own values to the other "each viewing the other's world as impoverished and/or unsafe, sees it as an occasion to 'rescue' the other" (Ryan 67). Morrison explains this problem in these words:

> I think that the conflict of genders is a cultural illness. Many of the problems modern couples have are caused not so much by conflicting gender roles as by the other 'differences' the culture offers. That is what the conflicts in Tar Baby are all about. Jadine and Son had no problems as far as men and women are concerned…The question for each was whether he or she was really a member of the tribe. It was not because he was a man and she was a woman that conflict arouse between them. (McKay 147)

Because of the cultural illness they are in, they cannot form a healthy relationship. When Jadine understands that their relationship will not work because of Son's ties to his culture and her reluctance to follow him, she leaves Son and goes back to Isle des Chevaliers just to pack her stuff and go back to Paris. At that point Ondine wants Jadine not to forget her past completely and advices her to be a daughter:

> A girl has to be a daughter first. She have to learn that. And if she never learns how to be a daughter, she can't never learn how to be a woman. I mean a real woman: a woman good enough for a child; good enough for a man—good enough even for the respect of other women…A daughter is a woman that takes care about where she come from and takes care of them

> that took care of her. No, I don't want you to be what you call a parent. What I want from you is what I want for you. I don't want you to care about me for my sake. I want you to care about me for yours. (Morrison, "Tar" 281)

Ondine is not strict as night women who want Jadine to change her life completely and she is not like Son who wants her to disregard American culture and connect to her African heritage. Ondine doesn't want her to change her life; she just wants her to care where she is from. Unfortunately, even this is too much for her. She objects Ondine's advise and argues that there are other ways to be a woman, "Your way is one, I guess it is, but it's not my way…I don't want to learn to be the kind of woman you're talking about because I don't want to be that kind of woman" (282). The change in Jadine is clear in these words. When she first came to the island she was uncertain about her identity and she was questioning whether she should be linked to her heritage. Now, she firmly believes that she doesn't need a connection to her past; this is why she decides to leave first Son, and then Ondine and Sydney for Paris "with a huge bag on her shoulder and a black fur coat and that she had been met by a young man with yellow hair and blue eyes and white skin" (300). Morrison doesn't explain Jadine's choice in a negative way, by comparing it to the relationship between the queen ant and soldier ants; she implies that her choice is also natural. Son, on the other hand at the beginning of the novel comes from nature, jumps from the ship and swims through the sea, and at the end of the novel he joins the wild horsemen of the island depicted as an ancestral figure so it symbolizes his reunion with his heritage. At this point, it is important to mention that Therese is the one who guides Son and makes him join the horsemen. She tells the story

of the horsemen to him, gives him a choice to join them, and he decides to do so. Even when no one is aware of Son's presence at home, she feels that he is there and leaves him fruits to eat. Therese is described as having breasts always full of milk (154) which symbolizes her nurturing capability: she accepts her role as a culture bearer and thus shows the right direction to Son.

While Son accepts Therese's ancestral presence and follows what she says Jadine is not even conscious of her presence; she doesn't know her name and calls her Mary which is a name for all the native island women. "From Therese's standpoint, Jadine has imbibed the unnatural nurturing indifference of the European-American woman" (Jennings 123). Therefore, Therese has no ancestral engagement with her and calls her an "American girl". Jadine is alienated from ancestral roots because she is raised separate from black culture; as a result of this, she experiences a crisis of identity: "an ancestral relationship with folk culture is lost to Jadine Childs through the patronage of Valerian Street, through education in select schools though the aspirations of her surrogate parents, Sydney and Ondine" (Paquet 193). In this regard, Jadine and Alma Estee have something similar: they both try to hide their heritage but they are different in some way:

> Alma Estee is used as a grotesque parody of the look, the consumables, and the produced desires that define Jadine. Yet she contrasts with Jadine who is linked imagistically to the perpetrators while Alma Estee is aligned with the victims. Her doe-like 'antelope' eyes are different from the predatory, rodent-like 'mink eyes' of Jadine; and Alma Estee's wig, the color of 'dried blood',

> makes her symbolically the bleeding victim, whereas Jadine's coat of clubbed baby seals puts her in the camp of the predators. (Matus 101-102)

While Alma Estee hides her identity under a wig, Jadine hides herself under her beauty and education. Alma Estee is a victim of the white culture which presents her certain kind of features to be a part of beauty myth. On the other hand, Jadine's lighter skin gives her a privileged status and alienates her from black culture, but more than her skin color her upbringing presents her other choices, and she chooses to deny her cultural heritage.

Her education and upbringing make her comfortable in white culture but even if she enjoys it, she can't stop questioning herself whether she is betraying her race by doing so. Consequently, she suffers from this double culture trouble because she assumes that she has to choose one of them which remind us Du Bois' statement:

> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (Du Bois 8)

Although Du Bois has written this text in a masculinist sense addressing only black males, we can apply the text to Jadine's condition. In Son and Jadine's case, neither of them is eager to accept their other self; Jadine has problems with her African roots whereas Son is not easy with an American identity. Du Bois' statement is not relevant for them, however, their stubborn notion of sticking in one part of African-American culture is used by Morrison to emphasize the importance of balance between two parts in one identity as she asserts in these words:

> In *Tar Baby*, if your values are like Jadine's, very contemporary, then you lose something if the past is anathema to you. On the other hand, if you are like Son and you are only concerned about the past, and you can't accommodate yourself to anything contemporary, you lose also. Most satisfactory evolutions of relationships with people have some sort of balance. (Jones and Vinson 178)

Neither of them can survive without the other part and they each lose some certain characteristics of being an African American by denying one part of their self. Since Morrison asserts that there must be a balance between these split parts, black/American identity, we can say that both of them are deficient without the other, so Morrison presents Son and Jadine as one complete self together. Michelle M. Wright also mentions the harmful and healing potential of Black self-consciousness as we have seen in Son and Jadine. According to Wright:

> Seeking to determine Black subjectivity in Black diaspora means constantly negotiating between two extremes. On the one hand stands the "blackness

> that swallows," the hypercollective, essentialist identity, which provides the comfort of absolutist assertions in exchange for the total annihilation of the self. On the other end stands the hyperindividual identity…which grants a wholly individualized (and somewhat fragmented) self in exchange for the annihilation of "Blackness" as a collective term. (3)

Son stands for the first group of hypercollective, essentialist identity while Jadine represents the second group of hyperindividual identity. This situation demonstrates that although they are both labeled as African American, within this label their approach to cultural identity is totally different and they are linked only in name.

Morrison consciously creates these characters as having different feelings toward culture. She argues that her characters learn something throughout her books (McKay 149), and for Jadine and Son the result is summarized in these words:

> What they have learned? How can you manage to love another person under these circumstances if your culture, your class, your education are different? All the while I wrote that book I was eager for them to make it. You know, end up and get married and go to the seashore…They didn't. They each had to learn something else, I think, before that could happen. (Moyers 270)

Morrison doesn't reunite them because at first they should learn that they cannot stick on just one culture as an African American person as Edward Said emphasizes it in Culture and Imperialism:

> No one today is purely *one* thing…Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical

> gift was to allow people to believe that they were only, mainly, exclusively, white or black, or Western, or Oriental. Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. No one can deny the persisting continuities of long traditions, sustained habitations, national languages, and cultural geographies, but there seems no reason except fear and prejudice to keep insisting on their separation and distinctiveness, as if that was all human life was about (Said 407-08).

It is clear that Morrison follows Said's steps of hybridity on the construction of cultural identity.

Since the novel takes its name from an African folk story, it is also worth considering the novel in terms of this story. According to Craig Werner "Tar Baby" story has a four-hundred year history, traceable to Africa. The story starts with Brer Rabbit seeing Tar Baby which is a tar shaped figure resembling a human and according to some versions of the story it is placed on Brer Rabbit's way by the other animals, in others by a white farmer. The story goes on as follows:

> Brer Rabbit greets Tar Baby, who of course does not reply. Angry at this insult, Brer Rabbit hits the Tar Baby and his paw sticks tight. As the cycle of perceived insult and retaliation repeats, Brer Rabbit gets progressively more stuck to the Tar Baby. Finally those who made Tar Baby appear to torment him with their cleverness and his helplessness. Brer Rabbit appears to be humble and submissive, but he fools his captors. Torture him in any way, he begs, but do not throw him into the nearby brier patch. Of course, rabbits live

> in brier patch, which are their best protection. Wanting to hurt him as much as possible, his captor throws him into the brier patch. From the safety of his home, Brer Rabbit taunts the captor, who has not only allowed the escape but has been used as the means of escape. (Kubitschek 108)

From the perspective of characters in the novel, each assumes that the other's values build a tar baby for herself/himself. For Jadine Son, the woman in the red dress, the swamp women, and the women in her dream are all tar babies leading her question the individual life she is living without giving importance to her culture. On the other hand, Jadine turns out to be a tar baby for Son since she tries to change his life like she did to herself. However, in the end both of them choose their own ways without accepting the cultural identity of the other.

CONCLUSION

In her three novels The Bluest Eye, Song of Solomon, and Tar Baby, written between 1970 and 1981, Toni Morrison demonstrates the history, lives and the identities of African Americans. In these novels, the central characters are women because as an African American woman, Morrison chooses to reflect the importance of women in African American society, and she focuses on which grounds African American women build their cultural identities. Morrison doesn't judge her characters, she just depicts the natural environment that creates them as they are, and she explains their struggle in this environment. Since Morrison knows the environment they are born into, she approaches her characters with tolerance but warns the readers not to forget their heritage and grow up disconnected to their cultural values.

In The Bluest Eye Pecola is the one who is deeply affected by the beauty standards of white culture. She is born into a family in which there is no compassion. The lack of love in the family is also the result of her parents' experiences of racism; however, this is not a phenomenon that Pecola would be able to understand at that age. She identifies the lack of love in her family with her lack of beauty, thus she internalizes the beauty standards, asks for blue eyes and slowly loses her mental health. Pauline doesn't show any compassion to her daughter because her education in movies have taught her the white standards of romantic love and beauty; as she cannot find these in her own house, she stops dealing with it and finds happiness in the house she is working for, thus she rejects her cultural identity which asks her to be a nurturer for her own house. Claudia, on the other hand, lives in the same community with Pecola but she is

not affected by these standards as much as Pecola did. Pecola's example helps her understand herself and the conditions she live in, and she can form a healthy identity.

In Song of Solomon Pilate is a symbol of commitment to African heritage because she is the ancestral figure in the novel. She is aware of the importance of the African cultural values, and although she has gone to many different places she carries her culture with her wherever she goes. She also helps Milkman to find his ancestral roots but she is not able to help her granddaughter Hagar who bounds her existence to the love of Milkman. Hagar thinks that she cannot exist without Milkman's love because being loved is equal to being accepted in her mind. Like Pecola, she assumes that the lack of love stems from her lack of beauty, and she breaks down mentally in the end. Hagar's situation demonstrates the difficult situation African American women are in because Pilate can help Milkman who is not damaged by sexist beauty oppression; however, she cannot help Hagar who is a victim of white culture's standards of beauty. Pilate is a culture bearer but Hagar cannot make use of her experiences once she accepts the dominant culture's values.

In Tar Baby, Alma Estee is a victim of beauty standards, too: she wears a wig just to conceal her identity whereas her mother Therese is quite opposite of her. Therese is an ancestral figure like Pilate and she is in the same condition Pilate in: she cannot help her daughter while she can help Son. Therefore, once more Morrison emphasizes that creating cultural identity is more difficult for the new generation's women than men because they are both victims of racism and sexism. In the novel Jadine represents a free woman who is living according to the values of Euro American culture and she feels

secure in this way. Although she is a self confident woman she feels disturbed when she meets with figures symbolizing true black womanhood and then she starts to question her disconnectedness with her African heritage. Morrison gives importance to the connection to the cultural values but she narrates Jadine as not accepting her culture bearer role, she doesn't judge her harshly because the conditions she lives in makes her this way. The fact that she is educated and independent is depicted in a positive way, and the only thing Morrison criticizes is her abandonment of all her African heritage.

It is a historical fact that Africans were brought to America as slaves but there is nothing to do about it now. Since they are disconnected from Africa and their practices of their own cultural values are restricted, they have mixed their values with European derived mainstream culture. Therefore, dreaming of Africa and just accepting African values is not true for African Americans anymore. On the other hand, following the Euro-American culture blindly without looking back to African heritage is not true either. As we have seen in the examples of African American women's experiences of cultural identity Morrison follows Said's and Bhabha's example that cultures are hybrid, and she believes that there has to be a balance between African and American culture in the formation of African American identity. As an African American herself she doesn't regard this diversity as a curse, on the contrary she believes that this is a positive quality. This is why she talks about this feature in her Nobel Lecture in 1993:

> I'm a Midwesterner, and everyone in Ohio is excited. I'm also a New Yorker, and a New Jerseyan, and an American, plus I'm an African-American, and a woman. I know it seems like I'm spreading like algae when I put it this way,

> but I'd like to think of the prize being distributed to these regions and nations and races. (qtd. in Grimes)

Morrison is proud of her ancestral heritage and this is why she wants to make her readers aware of their culture. Creating culture awareness can be possible with the help of writing novels and she acknowledges that African Americans need novel today:

> We don't live in places where we can hear those stories anymore; parents don't sit around and tell their children those classical, mythological, archetypal stories that we heard years ago. But new information has got to get out, and there are several ways to do it. One is in the novel. ("Roootedness" 328)

She gives importance to historical memory as an important element in the formation of cultural identity. Therefore she places historical memory in her novels to challenge the cultural hegemony of the dominant culture, and she uses the African American cultural heritage to remind her readers their roots: "Bearing witness to the past, Morrison's novels can also be seen as ceremonies of proper burial, an opportunity to put painful events of the past in a place where they no longer haunt successive generations" (Matus 2).

Morrison wants her novels to be political so that they can change the stance of new generations, and they would be at peace with their heritage. While doing so Morrison not only focuses on the lives of African American women, but she also uses forms of African culture while depicting their experiences. For example, in the three novels we have analyzed she uses story telling technique and oral tradition. She also

uses the folk story of Tar Baby, the traditional song of Solomon and the supernatural elements such as ghosts and living-dead ancestors in Song of Solomon; the wild horsemen of the island and the swamp women hanging from trees in Tar Baby. Moreover, she wants to remind African American women their cultural role of being the ancestors and culture bearers. These features make her a unique writer of African American Literature because she is an African American woman searching for African American women's cultural identity by practicing elements from African American culture in her novels.

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