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CONSTRUCTION OF FEMALE IDENTITY IN TONI MORRISON'S FICTION

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Construction of Female Identity in Toni Morrison's Fiction

Abstract

This thesis explores the questions of the female identity construction and female characters' crises of self-definition in Toni Morrison's fiction. The study incorporates a transdisciplinary and intersectional approach to the analysis of various perspectives that impact female characters' journey to self-discovery, encompassing political and historical, social, black feminist, narratological, and psychoanalytical perspectives, including literary trauma studies. In this thesis, identity is understood as an ever-changing concept that is influenced by many interconnected factors, including the impact of family, community, and social relationships.

The central subject of critical inquiry is the analysis of four novels written by Morrison: *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Tar Baby* (1981), and *Beloved* (1987). The selected novels tackle diverse historical periods, social and racial circumstances, and themes, which enables a comprehensive study of the identity construction of female characters. The thesis analyzes the important topics that undermine female characters' identity, such as beauty standards established by dominant tradition, the social judgment of women who defy gender roles and patriarchal traditions, the perception of black women through the "white gaze" and "male gaze" which causes the development of an inferiority complex, internalized racism and racial self-loathing, female characters' coping mechanisms when experiencing traumas, and the impacts of individual, collective and transgenerational traumas. Furthermore, the exploration of identity construction and identity crises incorporates the narratological analysis that explores the narrative techniques that reflect female characters' struggles on the road to self-discovery, their traumas, and repressed memory.

Key words: black feminist criticism, class, female identity, racism, sexism, slavery, Toni Morrison, trauma.

Scientific field: Social Sciences and Humanities

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Konstrukcija ženskog identiteta u prozi Toni Morison

Sažetak

Rad se bavi pitanjima konstrukcije ženskog identiteta i nastanka krize identita u prozi Toni Morison. Istraživanje koristi transdisciplinarni i intersekcionalni pristup pri analizi različitih perspektiva koje utiču na problematiku ženskog identiteta, koje uključuju političke i istorijske, sociološke i naratološke perspektive, crnu feminističku kritiku, i psihoanalizu i studije traume. Pojam identiteta se u radu posmatra kao koncept koji se stalno menja pod uticajem međusobno povezanih faktora, koji uključuju uticaj porodice, zajednice i društvenih odnosa.

Okosnicu kritičkog istraživanja čine analiza i tumačenje četiri romana Toni Morison: *Najplavlje oko* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Katreno luče* (1981) i *Voljena* (1987). Odabrana dela se bave različitim istorijskim periodima, društvenim i rasnim okolnostima i drugačijom tematikom, što omogućava sveobuhvatnu studiju o konstrukciji identiteta ženskih likova. Rad analizira značajne faktore koji dovode do krize ženskog identiteta, poput opšteprihvaćenih standarda lepote, društvene osude žena koje prkose patrijarhalnim tradicijama i rodnim stereotipima, uticaj takozvanog „belog pogleda" i „muškog pogleda" koji prouzrokuju kompleks niže vrednosti, internalizovani rasizam i samoprezir, odbrambene mehanizme kojima se ženski likovi služe u pokušajima da prevaziđu traumatična iskustva, i uticaj individualnih, kolektivnih i transgeneracijskih trauma. Tumačenje razvoja i krize ženskog identita podrazumeva i naratološku analizu narativnih tehnika kojima se predstavljaju potraga za identitetom, doživljene traume i potisnuta sećanja.

Ključne reči: crna feministička kritika, klasa, ženski identitet, rasizam, seksizam, ropstvo, Toni Morison, trauma.

Naučna oblast: Društveno-humanističke nauke

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CONTENTS

1 Introduction ... 1
1.1 The aim of the dissertation and expected results ... 2
1.2 Toni Morrison – Short overview of biographical data ... 5
1.3 Racial politics in Toni Morrison's fiction ... 9
1.4 The outline of the chapters ... 13
2 Theoretical perspectives on female identity in black studies ... 17
2.1 The concept of identity construction ... 17
2.2 The importance of an intersectional framework ... 23
2.3 Historical and political perspectives ... 25
2.4 Social perspective ... 29
2.5 Black feminist perspective ... 35
2.6 Narratological perspective ... 42
2.7 Literary trauma studies and psychoanalytical perspectives ... 46
3 The Bluest Eye ... 54
3.1 General introduction to *The Bluest Eye* ... 54
3.2 Conflicts of female identity from diversified perspectives ... 56
3.2.1 Historical and political perspectives ... 57
3.2.2 Social perspective ... 57
3.2.3 Black feminist criticism ... 58
3.2.4 Narratological perspective ... 61
3.2.5 Literary trauma studies and psychoanalytical perspective ... 64
3.3 Female characters' identity crises ... 67
3.3.1 Pauline ... 67
3.3.2 Pecola ... 70
3.3.3 Claudia ... 74
3.3.4 Geraldine ... 76
3.3.5 The three prostitutes ... 78
3.3.6 Maureen Peal ... 78
3.4 Themes that form problematic narratives surrounding female identity ... 79
3.4.1 White gaze, internalized racism ... 79
3.4.2 Community ... 85
3.4.3 Family and motherhood ... 87
3.4.4 Men and violence ... 90
3.5 From self-loathing to self-appreciation ... 93
4 Sula ... 95
4.1 General Introduction to *Sula* ... 95
4.2 Conflicts of female identity from diversified perspectives ... 97
4.2.1 Historical and political perspectives ... 97
4.2.2 Social perspective ... 99
4.2.3 Feminist criticism ... 103

4.2.4 Narratological perspective 106
4.2.5 Literary trauma studies and psychoanalytical perspective 109
4.3 Female characters' identity crises 111
4.3.1 Sula 111
4.3.2 Eva 118
4.3.3 Hannah 121
4.3.4 Nel 122
4.3.5 Helene Wright 126
4.4 Themes that form problematic narratives surrounding female identity 128
4.4.1 Family and motherhood 128
4.4.2 Friendship 132
4.4.3 Women and men 134
4.4.4 Community 136
4.5 From victimization to empowerment 140
5 Tar Baby 142
5.1 General Introduction to *Tar Baby* 142
5.2 Conflicts of female identity from diversified perspectives 143
5.2.1 Historical and political perspectives 144
5.2.2 Social perspective 147
5.2.3 Black feminist criticism 152
5.2.4 Narratological perspective 159
5.2.5 Literary trauma studies and psychoanalytical perspective 162
5.3 Female characters' identity crises 165
5.3.1 Jadine 165
5.3.2 Ondine 173
5.3.3 Thérèse 175
5.3.4 Margaret Street 176
5.4 Themes that form problematic narratives surrounding female identity 178
5.4.1 Racial discrimination, white gaze, and the male gaze 178
5.4.2 Loss of ancient properties 180
5.4.3 Family and motherhood 183
5.4.4 Women and men 185
5.4.5 Violence 188
5.5 From self-doubt to authenticity 190
6 Beloved 192
6.1 General introduction to *Beloved* 192
6.2 Conflicts of female identity from diversified perspectives 194
6.2.1 Historical and political perspectives 195
6.2.2 Social perspective 198
6.2.3 Black feminist criticism 201
6.2.4 Narratological perspective 205

6.2.5 Literary trauma studies and psychoanalytical perspective 211
6.3 Female characters' identity crises 218
6.3.1 Sethe 218
6.3.2 Beloved 222
6.3.3 Denver 225
6.3.4 Baby Suggs 228
6.4 Themes that form problematic narratives surrounding female identity 230
6.4.1 Racial discrimination, white gaze, and internalized racism 230
6.4.2 Family and motherhood 233
6.4.3 Men and women 236
6.4.4 Violence 239
6.4.5 Community 241
6.5 From deadly silence to speaking about the unspeakable 243
7 Conclusion 246
8 Works Cited 255

1 Introduction

The subject of this dissertation is the very complex question of the construction of female identity in Toni Morrison's fiction. The dissertation aims to shed light on various issues surrounding the construction of female identity, taking into consideration historical, political, and social circumstances and their impact on the behavior of female characters. The dissertation primarily aims to research the elaborate subject of female identity formation, including relevant factors that frame this subject, such as gender and racial discrimination, traditional patriarchal roles of women, traumatic experiences, and various forms of oppression and marginalization of women. The dissertation's theoretical framework encompasses gender studies, including new feminist criticism, black studies, psychoanalysis specifically emphasizing trauma studies, narratology, history, and sociology.

The central subject of critical inquiry is the detailed analysis and interpretation of four novels written by Toni Morrison: *The Bluest Eye* (1970), *Sula* (1973), *Tar Baby* (1981), and *Beloved* (1987). The reasons for selecting these four novels lie in inexorable connections that might be drawn among them and the relevance of novels in the context of the dissertation topic. The four novels address the pertinent issues of the construction and development of female identity when the interrelations of social, historical, political, and economic factors make the identity quest and process toward individuation difficult. The research aims to critically explore the identity crises in female characters, evident in Pecola's mental breakdown, Sula's persistent attempts to break free from patriarchal constraints, Jadine's insecurity regarding her self-image, and Sethe's inability to come to terms with her traumatized past. The dissertation offers critical perspectives on interconnections between gender, race, and class. It explores the various circumstances that determine the development of female identities and why female characters become marginalized and occupy inferior positions in society and their lives. The author will also make meaningful connections to the analyses of female characters through the lens of psychoanalytical criticism in an attempt to reveal why and how the dehumanizing atrocities of slavery, the accepted standards of beauty in the modern world, and the traditional patriarchal institutions have the destructive power when it comes to the construction and development of the identity of female characters. The problem of gender identity will also be observed through the frame of narratology, hoping to unravel the techniques and strategies in which gender politics and traumas are presented in Toni Morrison's fiction.

The dissertation is intended to be interdisciplinary research that will incorporate the fields of literary theory, feminist literary criticism, black studies, psychology, psychoanalysis, trauma studies, narratology, history, and sociology to explore various reasons and manifestations behind the identity crisis of the female characters in the aforementioned novels written by Toni Morrison. It is significant to emphasize that the characters' experiences may differ according to the various intersecting circumstances and layers of oppression they were exposed to.

The writing of the dissertation will include different research methods. These imply reading the relevant theoretical material in a detailed manner, comparing it, and drawing relevant conclusions through the processes of inductive and deductive reasoning. The description, analysis, and comparison methods will dominate all aspects of the dissertation. Careful attention will be devoted to the interdisciplinary connection of the aforementioned fields of study. The conclusion will synthesize the interpretations, ideas, and research presented in the dissertation that will bring about universal and clear conclusions.

1.1 The aim of the dissertation and expected results

This dissertation aims to examine different ways in which Toni Morrison depicts the problematics of the female identity crisis that is brought about by myriads of complex historical, political, and societal factors. Special attention will be attributed to important topics, such as dictated and defined beauty standards that pressurize women to change themselves to suit societal expectations; the criticism and condemnation of promiscuous women, while male promiscuity is considered natural, sometimes even desirable; the judgment of women who defy gender stereotypes wishing to be independent because they do not fulfill traditional patriarchal roles; difficult choices women have to make when faced with severe traumatic experiences; women's coping mechanisms when experiencing traumas. The dissertation will research the impact of patriarchy on women's lives through different historical periods that follow Toni Morrison's novels, such as colonialism, slavery, Reconstruction, the period of Jim Crow laws and civil rights, focusing on the strategies that Toni Morrison employs to question gender stereotypes in the selected novels.

When it comes to the complex notions of "identity" and its "construction," many scholars have attempted to provide appropriate definitions and explain the interconnectedness of factors that influence identity construction. On the topic of identity, a German linguist Florian Coulmas expresses his view:

> Individual identities are complex structures combining inherited features with various group memberships, loyalties, values, belief systems, and fashions. These structures adjust to changing circumstances and so does the concept of identity itself. Elements may be discarded or remixed, new ones added on occasion. Hence a definitive definition is not available (2019: 122).

The journey toward self-discovery is a challenging one, and it depends both on the personal character traits of an individual and the influence imposed on them by the community, family, social relationships, historical circumstances, traumatic experiences they might suffer through, and various forms of oppression they might be exposed to. This implies that many factors beyond the control of an individual determine self-actualization. Since a myriad of aspects has to be considered when discussing one's identity, and since these factors are different in each case, a precise definition of the term is not possible. It is noteworthy to observe that individuals are rarely aware of the various identity processes that occur during their lifetime. Coulmas adds to the discussion by saying: "Identity is not seen as a matter of choice. Those who emphasize identity rarely acknowledge its constructed and thus adaptable nature, but consider identity as non-negotiable, something that defines the group one belongs to as much as oneself" (2019: 57). Most individuals understand identity as an intrinsic part of their personality and do not realize that identity changes and alters over time, especially as a reaction to life events. This is especially true of children, as they are unaware of the identity development in the most sensitive years that prove crucial for healthy identity formation. Coulmas also mentions the obstacles that an individual might come across on their journey toward self-discovery: "The unwelcome results include identity conflict, role confusion, anxiety, fear of having no identity, and a loss of self" (2019: 87). The unfavorable conditions stemming from issues surrounding identity construction can drastically affect the individual and might have severe repercussions.

The development of female identity in Toni Morrison's fiction is primarily determined by the behavior, opinions, and stereotypes of white people that black people incorporate into their way of thinking and behaving, along with their own experience of blackness. Black people's awareness that race presents one of the delineating factors upon which discrimination is based shapes how they regard themselves and influences identity formation. Black people

grew up and lived in circumstances that suggested that the country's profit and advancement were more important than people's rights and freedoms. They faced discrimination in many spheres of their lives, such as education, culture, and politics. Historical and political conditions deprived them of education, advancement, jobs, and objectification of women challenged their potential when it came to motherhood, marriage, and family. Racism and discrimination, two dominant traumas of the 20th century, created an environment where black identity is often defined by the white gaze, how white people perceive black people, how they value their intelligence, physical appearance, whether they fulfill requirements of what they consider to be beautiful, etc. This collective trauma transferred to the following generations, resulting in the devastating fact that black women often value their personalities based on white people's opinions and consequently develop a feeling of insecurity, racial self-loathing, and internalized racism.

Moreover, Morrison draws attention to the American literary tradition that excludes black presence because of their racial, social, and class inferiority:

> There seems to be a more or less tacit agreement among literary scholars that, because American literature has been clearly the preserve of white male views, genius, and power, those views, genius, and power are without relationship to and removed from the overwhelming presence of black people in the United States (1993: 5).

Morrison sheds light on American literature that traditionally depicts dominant categories in society, including wealthy white men who have occupied the top position of racial, gender, and class hierarchies. Morrison hence wishes to alter this tradition by including the black experience and the damage that this view on dominant categories has caused when it comes to black people's identity development. Additionally, Morrison uses her fiction to draw attention to the unresolved problem of the view of black people through the white gaze, which has caused severe interference with their identity formation and instilled feelings of racial self-hatred, inferiority, and inadequacy. By writing about these issues in both her fiction and non-fiction, Morrison emphasizes that writers, her characters, and black people in general experience this problem – negation of the self due to the white gaze that both white and black people adopt. The author of the dissertation will attempt to tackle the reasons why white people's domination had such a powerful effect on gender identity in Toni Morrison's selected novels and how female characters try to reject this influence, which proves to be very challenging and not consistently successful. Additionally, the dissertation will emphasize that Morrison herself managed to resist these dominant stereotypes in her writing opus, although the most challenging part of freeing oneself from colonization and slavery is the decolonization of the mind and way of thinking. Commenting on the ordeal of decolonizing one's mind, Kevin Everod Quashie insightfully observes:

> The work of self-decolonization, which is also the work to articulate and define a relationship with memory, necessarily involves retelling and inventing stories to counter the oppressor but also presupposes a more intimate relationship to memory, one that acknowledges a communal agenda but remains entangled in memory as a selffull enterprise of one's subjectivity (2004: 109).

According to Quashie, it is necessary to verbalize the traumatic experiences. Morrison does so by writing about the horrendous consequences brought about by colonization. In this way, she preserved the memories of traumatic events, but she also aided the black community in decolonizing their minds and way of thinking.

The term “black people” was deliberately chosen throughout the dissertation as it denotes a more inclusive category than the term “African Americans.” “African Americans” is a more specific term that includes black people of African descent who live in the United States. On the other hand, the term “black people” includes people of African descent who live anywhere in the world, including the United States, Europe, the Caribbean, etc. Additionally, Morrison herself includes the term “black people” in her works of non-fiction, where she extensively wrote about racism (*The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches and Meditations*, 2019*)*. When asked to comment on the term “black writer,” Morrison explained that she does not consider the term pejorative: “I like it. I prefer it” (*Toni Morrison – The Pieces I am*, 1:18:21-1:18:23).

Moreover, the dissertation aims to question the primary hypotheses through the description, analysis, and comparison methods and find illustrative examples in the novels that prove them. I believe the dissertation will verify the validity of these hypotheses through a detailed analysis of the literary corpus and relevant theoretical resources. The primary hypotheses that the dissertation aims to explore include: the interpretation of identity development and identity crisis is inextricably linked to historical, political, and social context; in a quest toward understanding the construction and development of female identity, it is relevant to include the analysis of female characters within the framework of psychoanalysis and trauma studies; the female experience is primarily defined by the incorporation of “white gaze” and “male gaze” that both black and white people adopt in their perception of black women; the relationship between language and the female experience reveals essential aspects of an identity crisis. I expect the dissertation’s final result to be an original and convincing study that will shed light on various perspectives that affect the construction of female identity.

I believe that the relevance of the topic of this dissertation in the context of other studies written by Morrison scholars lies in its encompassing approach when it comes to the exploration of the identity formation of female characters. Unlike Harold Bloom (*Toni Morrison*, 2005), Tessa Roynon (*The Cambridge Introduction to Toni Morrison*, 2013), Carmen Gillespie (*Critical Companion to Toni Morrison: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work*, 2008), etc., who wrote comprehensive studies regarding Morrison’s life and work, this dissertation focuses on one aspect of research, namely construction of female identity throughout Morrison’s selected novels. On the other hand, authors such as Doreatha Drummond Mbalia (*Toni Morrison’s Developing Class Consciousness*, 2010), Andrea O’Really (*Toni Morrison and Motherhood: A Politics of the Heart*, 2004), Daniel Erickson (*Ghosts, Metaphor, and History in Toni Morrison’s Beloved Gabriel García Márquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude, 2009*), etc. focused their research on one aspect present in Morrison’s fiction, but none of them included a detailed study on female identity. Regarding the previous research on Morrison in Serbia, it is relevant to mention, among others, the doctoral dissertations of Ivana Jovanović Nikolić (*Elements of Subversion as a Method of Construction of Identity in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, 2022) who explores the music and laughter as means of subversion in Morrison’s fiction; Lejla Nikšić (*Racial Trauma and Cultural Contexts in Contemporary American Literature and Visual Arts on selected examples by Toni Morrison, Betye Saar, Kara Walker and Lorna Simpson*, 2021) who focuses her attention on the trauma of racism and cultural perspectives in literary and artistic works of four prominent authors; Tamara Jovović (*Afro-American Women Writers from the Perspective of Afro-American Black Feminism: Zora Neale Hurston, Alice Walker and Toni Morrison*, 2016) who analyzes three black female writers’ works from black feminist perspectives; and Jelena Dostanić (*Female Characters in the Novels of Toni Morrison, Margaret Atwood and Anita Desai from the Theoretical Perspectives of Feminism, Postmodernism and Postcolonialism*, 2015) who investigates female characters in the novels written by female writers from different historical and cultural backgrounds. This thesis will try to move forward with its research topic

and include a variety of perspectives (historical, social, psychoanalytical, narratological, etc.) and their interconnectedness when exploring the identity formation of female characters.

I believe that this dissertation might significantly contribute to the fields of feminist criticism and American literature as it will bring fresh perspectives on the interpretation of the development of female identity and the ways in which Toni Morrison and contemporary American literature tackle the female identity crisis. Furthermore, I hope this study will contribute to a better definition and understanding of feminist issues of modern times.

1.2 Toni Morrison – Short overview of biographical data[1]

Toni Morrison, one of the most distinguished and award-winning American writers, was born in 1931 as Chloe Ardelia Wofford. Morrison's great-grandparents were enslaved before the Civil War. Morrison's family originates from the North, but her grandfather (her mother's father), after having his farm taken away from him and having suffered great injustice by white people, moved the family to the North, to Ohio. Her paternal grandfather suffered lynching, so he moved his family as well. Racism, discrimination, and a history of slavery colored the lives of her closest family members and even her own pathway to adulthood. While growing up, Morrison was very well aware of racial segregation, some instances of which she experienced while studying at a university in Washington, where she saw racially segregated buses and restaurants for the first time. Morrison described the racial disparity she felt and witnessed: "The difficulty of being black was that we were not "people," we were "black people." I don't remember being unhappy about that, but there was this separation, and certain things we were not able to do and certain places we were not able to go, so we made our own neighborhoods" (Elkann, "Toni Morrison"). Given her family history, it is somewhat natural and expected that the primary subject matter in her fiction would be the struggles of black people in a predominantly white society. On the subject of Morrison's upbringing, Tessa Roynon emphasizes that Morrison was exposed to two different opinions regarding the topic of race while growing up:

> Her father maintained a lifelong suspicion of white people, and at least once she witnessed him attacking a white man whom he believed to be a threat to the children, whereas her mother judged every individual on his or her individual merits. These conflicting perspectives perhaps explain her acute authorial sensitivity to the complexities and ambiguities of racialized cultural formations and racist attitudes (2013: 3).

These contrasting viewpoints gave Morrison authenticity and sharpness while carefully observing the world around her and documenting it in her novels. They also enriched Morrison's understanding of the deeply ingrained tensions between white and black people, which she insightfully depicted while presenting their influence on the construction and development of female identities.

Despite the difficult life circumstances that her family had lived through, Morrison was motivated to read by her family members; even her grandfather, who did not go to school, was an avid reader. Morrison explains the significance of her grandfather's literacy: "It was illegal

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[1] Sources for the biographical data: *Toni Morrison: The Pieces I am* (directed by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders, 2019), Justine Tally – *The Cambridge Companion to Toni Morrison* (2007), Tessa Roynon – *The Cambridge Introduction to Toni Morrison* (2013), Carmen Gillespie – *Critical Companion to Toni Morrison: A Literary Reference to Her Life and Work* (2008), Harold Bloom – *Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eye* (2010).

in his life to read and it was illegal for white people to teach black kids to read. So it was a revolutionary thing" (*Toni Morrison – The Pieces I am* 2:18-2:30). She was the first person in her family to attend college, and she was the first black woman to hold a named chair at an Ivy League University, Princeton. Additionally, she was the first black woman to hold the senior editor position at Random House in New York. Among many accolades that Morrison received, it is relevant to mention that she won the Pulitzer Prize and Robert F. Kennedy Award for *Beloved* and that she was the first black woman who was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

Belonging to two marginalized categories, being a woman and notably a black woman, Morrison has firsthand experience of all the obstacles black women face on their road to self-discovery. In her literature, Morrison breaks taboos, challenges dominant culture, changes established concepts and beliefs, and manages to tackle some of the most critical issues of modern times – racial and gender discrimination, as well as other forms of oppression, such as class distinctions, patriarchal oppression, internalized racist oppression, etc. However, that does not mean that Morrison's fiction only addresses marginalized and oppressed audiences. Regarding art's universality, Rita Felski shrewdly observed: "Great art speaks beyond its time and place, and, what is more, it speaks to everybody. Defying details of history and context, gender, ethnicity, or creed, it embodies quintessential truths. Literature is universal because it speaks to a common, shared humanity" (2003: 14). Even though Morrison primarily writes about black people, her novels are read, understood, and appreciated by all different "races," religions, and nationalities. Morrison's fiction transcends all the divisions that might exist between black and white people as it tackles the omnipresent issues that readers can easily relate to. According to Justine Tally,

> These days, however, it is more than inappropriate to define Morrison as "marginal," not because she has moved to the center of the canon, but because she has managed to move the center; or perhaps it would be more appropriate to say that because of her multi-faceted and untiring work, she has helped change a restricted, predominantly white, and male-centered literary world into a multicultural mosaic (2007:1).

Morrison has made a substantial contribution to modern American literature, as the literature written by black authors is now considered an integral and inseparable fragment of American literature and culture. Morrison brought marginalized characters to the fore of her novels, thus showing that they deserve a prominent place in American literature. Morrison seems competent in examining the construction of female identity through various frameworks, as the development of her own identity was intricately linked to many complex factors. Susan R. Bowers broadly supports this claim by saying: "Morrison was born into the cauldron of race in America only sixty years after Emancipation, and her identity has been shaped by the history, life experiences, and culture that she has in common with other African Americans" (2010: 39). Morrison's identity formation was influenced by the interconnectedness of historical and social circumstances, which equipped her with insightfulness and competence to write novels addressing these issues and depicting female characters whose identity is also threatened by an intersection of various perspectives.

Morrison primarily writes about black women who occupy the central position in her literary opus. Morrison explains the literary tradition she attempted to change with her works: "The assumption is that the reader is a white person. And that troubled me. They were never talking to me" (*Toni Morrison – The Pieces I am*, 9:46-10:4). Morrison wishes all the readers to feel included and spoken to, regardless of the color of their skin. However, Morrison especially wants black people to feel addressed, which she felt literature lacked. Since Morrison is a black woman herself, she is very well aware of all the ordeals surrounding the

life of marginalized categories. Morrison recalls a situation at work when she found out that her male co-workers were paid more money because of their gender. Morrison told her boss: “You may think I’m colored or woman or this… I am head of household. Just like you” (*Toni Morrison – The Pieces I am*, 56:25-56:37). Her speech got her the raise but also the increased awareness that women were still considered inferior to men and very often treated in that way.

Morrison gives voice to the voiceless, silenced, and marginalized in her fiction. Her novels are often seen as a critique of the social, historical, and political environment. Morrison depicts the atrocities of slavery, infanticide, rape, pain, and horror, many issues that people would rather not discuss but which are integral parts of many black lives. Morrison is fearless in examining the problems within the black community, mainly when she portrays the cliché characters, such as a black man raping his daughter, a black woman being promiscuous, the physical and psychological violence among black people, neglectful mothers, ugly families, black women’s aspirations to look like white women, etc. In this way, she illustrates that the black population is not a homogeneous group and encompasses people who are very different from each other. However, simultaneously, Morrison writes about female characters who confront prejudices and stereotypes about black women that describe them as inferior and uneducated. Therefore, she offers a variety of characters with different personalities and life circumstances, of different ages, levels of education, and belonging to different social classes, while they all have something in common – they all struggle to fight the obstacles on their road to self-discovery in complex historical, social, political, and traumatic circumstances.

Commenting on the universality of the topics Morrison tackles in her fiction, Justine Tally observed: “[…] Morrison may be talking about the past, but she is speaking to the present” (2007: 3). Morrison’s fiction demands readers’ active participation in interpreting the plot, filling in the gaps of narration, making connections and drawing conclusions. Her novels overcome all the religious, national, and gender boundaries because they speak a universal language and tackle universal topics. As Barbara Christian noted: “Deeply rooted in history and mythology, her work resonates with mixtures of pleasure and pain, wonder and horror. There is something primal about her characters. They come at you with the force and beauty of gushing water, seemingly fantastic but as basic as the earth they stand on” (1985: 24). Readers sympathize with the female characters, but they also recognize parts of themselves in them. Additionally, Morrison does not judge or impose personal opinions when it comes to the characters’ actions; she conveys various perspectives and motives, which invoke compassion and understanding among the readers, even when she describes characters such as Cholly Breedlove, an alcoholic, abusive father and husband, and Soaphead Church, a misanthropic pedophile who takes great pride in his mixed blood and white ancestry. Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos insightfully describes the way Morrison portrays her characters: “There is also an implicitly forgiving attitude in Morrison towards all her characters” (2010:66). It seems that Morrison strives assiduously to express an objective attitude when examining the complexity of problems that surround the construction of characters’ identity.

In a documentary about her life and work, Morrison explains how she realized at a very young age that words were powerful. Morrison told a story about her mother getting upset that she and her sister wanted to write a swear word which drew her to the conclusion: “But ultimately I knew that words have power. Words can do that to my mother, a word I don’t even know. Well, that is power” (*Toni Morrison: The Pieces I am*, 4:10-4:22). Morrison was only a child when she understood the interconnectedness between words and emotions that they provoked in people which is the feature that makes them extremely powerful. In the same documentary, Morrison mentions her novel *Paradise* which was banned from prison, the explanation being that it was dangerous as it could start a riot. Morrison humorously observed: “And I thought: how powerful is that? I could tear up the whole place” (*Toni Morrison: The Pieces I am*, 28:36-28:43). The most significant evidence of the power of words is the attempt

to prevent people from hearing them. Throughout history, marginalized categories of society were forbidden to learn how to read as books provoke thoughts and might incite actions. In the same way that white slaveholders were concerned about enslaved people learning how to read and gaining ideas about the possibility to revolt, when Morrison's novel was banned from prison, the authorities were worried that the novel might inspire disobedience among prisoners.

It is noteworthy to observe that Morrison based some fragments of her novels on the people and places from her own life. Still, these were only fragments, such as the story about the girl who wished for blue eyes, the mysterious presence of a woman named Hannah Peace, or the newspaper story covering the news of Margaret Garner, that she developed into masterpieces. Morrison recalls:

> My mother's friends and my mother knew a woman called Hannah Peace, who – I don't know much about her, except I remember how she looked, not a lot, just the color of her skin, so dark, rose in it, and the lids of her eyes were very deep. Now I was little, so she seemed tall to me. And my mother and her friends, whenever they mentioned her name, and called her Hannah Peace, it seemed to me in the way they called her name there was some mixture of awe and approbation, some quality of both in it ("The One Out of Sequence" 1994: 79).

Morrison highlights that she does not remember all the details regarding the image of Hannah Peace, but she memorized some important features that she incorporated into her writing. On the other hand, she did include the factual historical moments that framed the novels to provide the background context and explain the reasons behind traumatic events and their consequences. Tessa Roynon delivers an explanation for the mixture of historical context with personal stories: "The novelist's weaving of the details of her life into her art indicates her deeply held conviction that an individual's experiences and the nation's history, or the personal and the political, are inextricably bound" (2013: 2). Including personal stories amid important historical event carries resonant power among readers. Reading about slavery, cruel and degrading treatment of enslaved people, sexual violence, and civil wars from history books or newspapers will not cause the same reaction in a reader as will the dramatic depiction of Sethe's scars and the Schoolteacher's nephews stealing her milk, or Eva's love for her children and sacrifices she made for them, or Pecola's tragic fate and fall into insanity. Additionally, Morrison's novels illustrate the effect that significant historical occurrences, such as colonization and slavery, have on individuals, demonstrating that a country's pursuit of wealth and economic advancement might have severe consequences on the whole nation.

With regard to historical context, Morrison explains why she considers her work to be of crucial importance:

> Certain kinds of trauma visited on peoples are so deep, so cruel, that unlike money, unlike vengeance, even unlike justice, or rights, or the goodwill of others, only writers can translate such trauma and turn sorrow into meaning, sharpening the moral imagination. A writer's life and work are not a gift to mankind; they are its necessity (2019: iii).

The writer's job is to observe society and be the commentator on certain political and social situations, especially traumatic ones, and explore their influence on people. Occasionally, writers' works prove to be beneficial when they help readers comprehend traumas, their meanings, and their consequences through the personal stories of individuals. Discussing the purpose of Morrison's fiction, Denise Heinze makes an interesting analogy:

> One wonders if Morrison's novels function in the same way that the ghost Beloved does – to haunt and torment a guilty conscience in need of absolution and redemption, for in each of her works Morrison launders one American ideal after another, while a huge contingency of Americans – male and female, black and white, rich and poor – wildly cheer her on (1993: 3).

If we were to compare Morrison to Beloved, then the role and aim of Morrison's writing could be interpreted as the encouraging force that suggests to people that they need to deal with traumas of the past to be able to recover from trauma and defeat obstacles on their journey to self-discovery. Understood in this way, this interpretation has general importance and can be applied to all people, regardless of the color of their skin, their gender, or nationality, which is the reason why Morrison's audience comprises people who belong to different racial, social, and gender categories.

1.3 Racial politics in Toni Morrison's fiction

As has already been mentioned, racial disparity played a substantial role in Morrison's life and is one of her fiction's central themes. Regarding the problems that surround the lives of black women writers, Elaine Showalter accurately describes some of the issues they face: "A black American woman poet, for example, would have her literary identity formed by the dominant (white male) tradition, by a muted women's culture, and by a muted black culture. She would be affected by both sexual and racial politics in a combination unique to her case…" (1985: 264). A black woman writer's identity is shaped according to many marginalized categories that highlight their race, gender, and societal position. Toni Morrison is rarely talked about in literary circles without highlighting the fact that she is black and a woman. These two aspects define her identity as an author.

The longstanding tradition of exclusion of black people from the American education system, government, culture, and tradition has left deleterious and far-reaching consequences on black people. The Americans manipulated language to denote the difference between themselves and the black population by using the word "Negro" when addressing or talking about black people, and author Richard Wright elaborates on the usage of this specific word:

> The word "Negro," the term by which, orally or in print, we black folk in the United States are usually designated, is not really a name at all nor a description, but a psychological island whose objective form is the most unanimous fiat in all American history; a fiat buttressed by popular and national tradition, and written down in many state and city statues; a fiat which artificially and arbitrarily defines, regulates, and limits in scope of meaning the vital contours of our lives, and the lives of our children and our children's children (1941:30).

The term "Negro" usually has a derogatory connotation, and it is used to differentiate white people from black people. Apart from its segregating meaning in the literal sense, denoting that white and black people are strikingly different in terms of their physical appearance, class, and status in society, this word also imposes psychological consequences on black people that supply them with an inferiority complex and feelings of inadequacy. Having already been ousted from their countries, compelled to forget their native language, customs, and traditions, and forced to perform hard work to contribute to the advancement of a country that is not theirs, they were additionally burdened with the feeling of not belonging anywhere, and being called derogatory names to emphasize their exclusion. The result of this is felt by the future generations of black people, who were even born in the United States and had no real ties to

the country of origin of their ancestors. Pertaining to this transgenerational influence, a professor of sociology and author Ron Eyerman remarks: "[…] blacks in the United States were identified with and came to identify themselves through the memory and representation of slavery. This came about not as an isolated or internally controlled process, but in relation and response to the dominant culture" (2003: 14). The trauma of slavery follows the black people's descendants as the result of the behavior of both black and white people. Black people consider the experience of slavery as an integrated part of their identity that they feel obliged to share with younger generations, while white people constantly remind black people of their past by perpetuating racist, discriminatory practices and maintaining dominant white cultural elements that exclude black people. The traumas of slavery and the past are illustrated in Morrison's fiction as literal and psychological consequences on female characters. Sethe cannot let go of the past and forgive herself, surrounded by literal reminders of slavery in the form of chokecherry tree scars on her back and metaphorical reminders in the form of rememory that she seems unable to suppress. On the other hand, Jadine and Denver, both of them not having had a firsthand experience of traumatic events, experience struggles on their road to self-discovery, being constantly reminded of their origin.

When presenting racial ideology in her works, Morrison shows both visible and invisible consequences of racism. Morrison mentions the racially discriminatory practices Pecola experienced in *The Bluest Eye*: "So I wanted to say this kind of racism hurts. This is not lynchings and murders and drownings. This is interior pain. So deep for an 11-year-old girl to believe that if she only had some characteristic of the white world, she would be okay" (*Toni Morrison – The Pieces I am*, 17:52-18:20). While physical, visible indicators of racism were evident in segregating sections of public life, interior, invisible repercussions of racism can be much more perilous and threatening to one's state of mind, as evidenced by Pecola's fall into insanity. These hidden repercussions of racism include pain, racial self-loathing, and an inferiority complex that might bring about severe mental problems.

Furthermore, Morrison explains that racism hurts not only black people who are discriminated against but white people as well, the ones who discriminate against others:

> It has just as much of a deleterious effect on white people as it does black people. It's the racist white person who doesn't understand that he or she is also a race, it's also constructed, it's also made, and also has some kind of serviceability. But when you take it away, if I take your race away, and there you are, all strung out and all you got is your little self and what is that? What are you without racism? Are you any good? And still strong? And still smart? (*Toni Morrison – The Pieces I am*, 1:41:45-1:42:22).

Morrison explains that race is a socially constructed category utilized for discrimination purposes. However, this social construct is very powerful as it convinces the members of one race that they are superior to the members of another race. These beliefs and judgments of one's character based solely on skin color are superficial and arbitrary, as Morrison emphasizes that people should not be valued based on a social construct but on their own personal merits.

In racial ideology discussion, it is also relevant to mention the phenomenon of the "white gaze," which will be explained in great detail in the following chapters, and its profound effect on the identity formation of both male and female characters. The "white gaze" refers to how people who are considered to represent the dominant tradition in society perceive those they consider inferior. Morrison's female characters appear to be permanently damaged through the internalization of both the white and male gazes. Morrison displays many instances of characters' internalization of the white gaze, such as Pecola, whose unrealistic wish to possess blue eyes mirrors her wrong equation of having blue eyes and being accepted and

loved; Pauline's childbirth trauma when the white doctor looks down on her and disregards her pain; Sethe's doubt of her self-worth because of the Schoolteacher's list of her animal characteristics, etc. On the other hand, Morrison also portrays beautiful, intelligent, and desirable black women, such as Sula and Jadine, who defy the white gaze through their independence and attractiveness. It is also noteworthy to emphasize that Morrison does not portray all white characters as villains, cruel and supportive of slavery. She does not generalize, and also gives descriptions of white people who are helpful and even played a crucial role in assisting black people in their struggles, such as Amy Denver who helps Sethe deliver a baby or Valerian and Margaret Street who financially help Jadine obtain an education and become a successful independent woman.

However, it is worthy of critical attention to highlight that Morrison does not blame only white people for creating the "white gaze" that disdains black men and women. Regarding black people's role in confronting the power of the white gaze, bell hooks suggests her view on the subjects:

> White women are not the only group who must confront racism if Sisterhood is to emerge. Women of color must confront our absorption of white supremacist beliefs, "internalized racism," which may lead us to feel self-hate, to vent anger and rage and injustice at one another rather than at oppressive forces, to hurt and abuse one another, or to lead one ethnic group to make no effort to communicate with another. Often women of color from varied ethnic groups have learned to resent and hate one another, or to be competitive with one another (1984: 55).

bell hooks believes that the key to the successful resolution of the racist discrimination that not only defines the lives of black women but also causes conflicts among them is the joint effort of both races. White women should work towards eradicating their racist opinions, while black women should eliminate the internalized racism that they adopt in their perception of themselves and other black women, as this might lead to racial self-loathing, feelings of insecurity, and inferiority. These are very often the cases of misplaced hatred; instead of directing these negative feelings toward the people who discriminate against them based on the color of their skin, black people turn these feelings into internalized racism.

Morrison's power against racism and sexism are words. She utilizes her literary talent to draw attention to racial ideology and invites both white and black people to ponder the racial issues coloring the lives of black people. Morrison is very well aware of words' "magical power" (Freud 1943: 19). She uses them to provide social commentary on the political and historical situation and subvert the dominant white ideology. Elizabeth Ann Beaulieu further explains Morrison's literary position:

> She speaks as a Black woman in a world that still undervalues the voice of the Black woman. She blends the personal and the political – for she feels very strongly that art should have meaning – to depict African American cultural and social history, and she does so in a way that resonates for readers of all ages, races, ethnicities, and genders (2003: vii).

Morrison understands the importance of combining historically relevant traumas with personal traumatized experiences as a way to attract readers' attention and convey objective versions of historical events. Morrison comprehends her responsibility as a black female author and enriches her novels with significant issues surrounding black people's lives, hoping to raise awareness of all people, regardless of their race.

One of the reasons why it is important to understand racial ideology is because racism causes trauma that is detrimental to the black community in many ways. When it comes to the history of black people's journey from Africa to the United States and the history of slavery, many silences and blanks should not occur when critical historical events are discussed. Regarding the connection of one's history to their identity formation, psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Dori Laub comments on its importance: "This loss of the capacity to be a witness to oneself and thus to witness from the inside is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, for when one's history is abolished, one's identity ceases to exist as well" (1995: 67). If we negate the history of black people, we also negate a pivotal aspect of their identity – their right to know about their origin and background. Many female characters in Morrison's novels struggle with identity formation due to not learning about their past and history, as ignorance about one's history also means ignorance about cultural heritage and tradition.

Morrison's originality in writing stems from incorporating black people's perspectives when describing characters and events. Morrison comments on the uniqueness of her writing style:

> No African American writer has ever done what I did, which was to write without the *white gaze*. This wasn't about them… I really felt original. I really did. I hate to admit that because it sounds so self-regarding… There was nobody else who was going to make the center of the novel "the most helpless creature in the world: a little black girl who doesn't know anything, and who believes all that racist stuff, so *vulnerable*, so *nuts*". This was brand new space (qtd. in Wagner-Martin 2015: 10).

Since Morrison writes about the past traumatic events and personality traits of her people, people she knew about, and people she heard stories from, her novels reflect authenticity. Additionally, her innovative approach to writing includes the absence of white characters as protagonists; Morrison writes from the point of view of black people. While investigating all the complex factors surrounding the construction of female identity, Morrison simultaneously reveals the reasons behind the national identity crisis known to many black people.

Reading Morrison's fiction, it is evident that she foregrounds the additional disadvantage that black women face in the form of gender oppression. Female characters are subjected to endless suffering on their road to self-discovery, trying to escape racist and sexist discrimination. Even though they belong to two marginalized categories according to race and gender, Morrison does not portray all her female characters as poor, weak, and marginal. Despite unfortunate circumstances, many of her characters are strong and self-sufficient women who overcome the racial ideology and find their place in the unwelcoming social and political environment. In this way, Morrison celebrates the qualities of black women, their strength, and their ability to conquer the traumas of the past. It seems that Morrison wishes to suggest that all people might be capable of greatness, but that oppression of both minds and bodies of black women does not even offer them the opportunity to discover what they are capable of. Morrison reports the heroic acts of Sethe and Eva, who go to great lengths to protect their children from what they consider to be the greater evil; the remarkable persistence of Sula and Jadine to follow desired paths in life despite social conventions; psychological maturity of Claudia who resists the specified standards of beauty; newfound strength of Denver who prevails over the past traumatic experiences and takes control of her life and future. However, at the same time, Morrison is aware of the hardships black women have had to endure. K.C. Lalthlamuani adequately explains Morrison's portrayal of black women's struggles: "Morrison sensitively depicts the brutality against women at the hands of men, the society, and the power structure in a vivid and sensuous way that sensitizes us to relate it to the vulnerability of

helpless animals or nature, and the naked brutality against them" (2014: 216). In addition to the images of strong and independent women, Morrison also wants to paint the picture of all the horrors that black women have endured and show that some of them, aided by the community, willpower, and family support, managed to come out as winners.

Another important remark about Morrison's fiction is that it is filled with tensions, between black and white people, among the black population, between men and women, among women themselves, and between different generations. Regarding the tensions in Morrison's fiction, Herbert William Rice shrewdly observes: "Thus, the tension we find in Morrison's work actually mirrors a tension that exists within the American tradition itself" (1996: 9). In this way, Morrison's novels represent a powerful metaphor for the American society and all the tensions among its people. However, by addressing these issues in her work, Morrison makes an important step toward informing readers about these issues, regardless of the race, gender, social class, religion, or nationality they belong to. Pin-chia Feng uncovers the reasons why Morrison writes about tensions: "Morrison writes to challenge the reader's literary imagination and social consciousness. She also writes to open the eyes of both dominant and minority communities" (1998: 73). Three hundred years of oppression in the United States have had dire consequences, not just for the black people directly affected by slavery, but also for their descendants who carry the burden of their heritage and painful history of their families. These experiences translate into a collective trauma that younger generations deal with and transform into feelings of not belonging. A considerable number of deaths of black people (the precise number of which cannot be determined as no records were kept on this matter), along with the lack of memorials as a testimony to this horrendous episode of American history, testify to the prevalent opinion that black lives were undervalued and considered unimportant. Morrison insists that the job of remembrance and correction of untruthful claims is ours:

> Yes, the reclamation of the history of black people in this country is paramount in its importance because while you can't really blame the conqueror for writing history his own way, you can certainly debate it. There's a great deal of obfuscation and distortion and erasure, so that the presence and the heartbeat of black people has been systematically annihilated in many, many ways and the job of recovery is ours. It's a serious responsibility and one single human being can only do a very very tiny part of that, but it seems to be both secular and non-secular work for a writer (1994: 224).

And Morrison's fiction does precisely that – challenges the official version of history and raises awareness of the importance of presenting points of view of all the participants in historical events, together with the inevitable consequences that some of them may suffer. Morrison's literature is a testimony to the struggles of black people, and her words are her most powerful instrument in accomplishing this mission.

1.4 The outline of the chapters

The introduction has outlined the main idea of the dissertation; it has explained the main hypotheses that the dissertation aims to prove and the conclusions that the author might draw. The introduction has also tackled the life and opus of Toni Morrison. It has offered a brief outline of biographical data relevant to the subject matter of the dissertation, paying particular attention to the difficulties and obstacles that follow the life and career of a marginalized social category, a black woman. In addition, this chapter has pondered racial ideology that very prominently governed all the aspects of Toni Morrison's private life and

literary career, as well as the female characters in the selected novels. This chapter has also evoked Morrison's essays in which she vocalizes the issues of racial hierarchy and political deception of the United States of America that simultaneously celebrate individualism and deny it to the black population.

The second chapter will discuss the possible definitions and meanings of the very complex concepts of identity and its construction. It will attempt to explain interrelated factors that influence identity formation, such as ethnicity, traumatized past, dominant culture, the adoption of "white gaze" and "male gaze," and the importance of family and community, with a principal focus on motherhood and dysfunctional families, stigmas, and significance of female friendships. This chapter will also attempt to display the interconnectedness of these factors with the construction of female characters' identities in the selected novels. Additionally, the second chapter will present the theoretical framework of the research and a plethora of perspectives that will be analyzed in great detail in the following chapters. These perspectives include historical and political contexts; social views; black feminist perspectives; the adoption of the "white gaze" and the resulting internalized racism; linguistic representation of traumas through the use of various narrative strategies; psychoanalytical approach to analysis with a particular emphasis on trauma studies.

The third chapter will explore the irreparable and disastrous consequences that racial stereotypes and prejudices have when it comes to the psychological development of young women, as is depicted in the controversial novel *The Bluest Eye.* The detailed analysis of the novel will tackle the topics of incest and physical and psychological abuse, emphasizing the far-reaching repercussions they leave on the development of female identity, even causing mental illness. This chapter will explain how neurotic manifestations brought about by traumatic events may lead to regression regarding identity development. One of the dominant themes in the novel is the superficial and yet widespread understanding of the concept of beauty, as the girls and women who do not belong to the category of the accepted beauty standards develop an inferiority complex. Another reason why female characters face identity crises are dysfunctional families, as children witness alcoholism, the father's aggressive behavior, and the abuse of the mother. The children brought up in such destructive families learn that women are supposed to suffer violence, and women who voluntarily stay married to aggressive men provide wrong role models to their children, one that will permanently hinder their identity development. This chapter will pinpoint another critical aspect of gender identity – idealization of the members of the white race and scorn for the black origin and uniqueness, so-called internalized racism, that is adopted in the earliest and most vulnerable period – in childhood. This chapter demonstrates how prevalent themes portrayed in the novel – child molestation, domestic violence, racial self-loathing, racial pride, and inferiority complex – have a crucial role in the years that are central to healthy identity formation.

The fourth chapter discusses the novel *Sula* and emphasizes the importance of sisterhood and mutual support among women, especially since they are often susceptible to criticism and judgment. This chapter will address the principles of double standards between men and women, given that society condemns Sula for her unconventional lifestyle since she defies gender stereotypes and patriarchal tradition in her independence and insistence not to rely on anyone and not to start a family. It will also inspect adverse circumstances of maintaining one's individuality in a place where prejudices and stereotypes prevail in the community. Moreover, this chapter will scrutinize the relationship between white and black people; it will exemplify how white people continue to disdain black people many years after the abolition of slavery, with a particular emphasis on the way they perceive black women and their relationship with them. By portraying familial and friendly relationships among black women, Morrison describes a dazzling array of elements that comprises the relationship between women, such as betrayal, reconciliation, and keeping secrets, and illustrates how

female friendships can both nurture and threaten female identity. This chapter will also attempt to uncover various reasons why the black community is traumatized, giving an example of Sula and Nel, who grew up in families traumatized by racial, class, and social oppression. Additionally, the novel alludes to collective trauma as the consequence of the participation of black people in war. Trauma generated by war brutalities, poverty, and historical and political circumstances brought about unusual relationships among women, especially those between mothers and daughters. These relationships that sprung up from traumatic events tend to be based on preservation and survival rather than expressions of love that children usually expect to see from their parents. By incorporating three generations of women, Morrison highlights the importance of family in character development. This chapter will aim to explain how the interrelationship of all of these factors affects gender identity and reveal the defense mechanisms that female characters employ to overcome the psychological consequences of traumatic events.

The fifth chapter will discuss the significance of men and their impact on women's lives in the novel *Tar Baby*. Female characters' experiences in the novel illustrate that women are seldom seen as individuals in men's eyes and are often belittled, disrespected, and considered inferior. This behavior negatively reflects on women who adopt the "male gaze," remain in unhappy marriages and become unsuitable mothers, whose children consequently adopt and accept racial and gender stereotypes. This chapter will also analyze social conventions and attempt to answer the question of why, despite numerous historical changes and advancements, one does not notice substantial changes in the development of female identity when it comes to dependence on men. Furthermore, it will concentrate on the problems of slavery and how it affected the later generations that had not experienced slavery and that often neglect their culture and origin, thus concurring with the opinion of white people who believe that black culture is inferior to what is perceived to be the American culture. Furthermore, it will bring to the fore the hierarchy among black people and the differences between older and younger generations, particularly regarding their opinions on appropriate women's behavior. Moreover, this chapter will pinpoint the impact of the hidden racism, discrimination, and stereotypes toward black people that do not cease, even among black people themselves, who, despite belonging to the same race, often discriminate against each other based on class differences, financial status, etc. *Tar Baby* also explores the power relations between a man and a woman in a romantic relationship and shows how class differences are often impossible to overcome. Finally, this chapter will attempt to fathom the underlying causes of Jadine's identity crisis, evident in isolation from racial and patriarchal expectations, personal anxiety and self-loathing, comprehension of racial hierarchies, the white male gaze that Jadine adopts, and the quest for authenticity. Finally, this chapter will compare and contrast the identity crisis of both black and white women according to their different backgrounds, especially regarding class, physical appearance, and origin.

The sixth chapter will explore the novel *Beloved,* which depicts the most severe identity crisis compared to other researched novels. This novel chronicles trauma, its impact on female characters, and its consequences, which is why the interconnectedness of history, traumatized memory, and literature will be investigated, together with the analysis of life that ensues after trauma. Describing the primitive behaviors of slaveholders and all the atrocities of slavery vividly and without censorship, Morrison presents a world in which people are entirely deprived of their own identity and do not have the right to possess their name, property, or even their children. The concept of family was supposed to be unfamiliar to enslaved people, but just because something was determined by law does not mean it would be a natural part of people's feelings and lives. The protagonist of *Beloved* carries out the unforgivable act of murdering her daughter, simultaneously illustrating the strong personality of a woman who refuses to allow her children to suffer through the horrors of slavery that she personally

experienced and the fatal weakness of a woman who found herself in a hopeless situation and could not find an alternative way to protect her beloved ones. Her identity is determined by historical circumstances and a feeling of guilt that she was the one who survived. This chapter is an analytical interpretation of trauma and the ways in which trauma manifests itself through language and psychological processes. Primarily it will focus on Morrison's narrative representation of what was for a very long time considered to be unrepresentable, in her own words, "unspeakable things unspoken" (Morrison 2019: 153) and the analysis of the relationship between language and the female experience in the novel. Furthermore, it will explore the power of forgotten and repressed memory, especially what Morrison termed rememory, regarding individual and collective traumas.

The final chapter, the conclusion, will offer a short overview and recapitulation of the presented material and draw relevant conclusions based on the interpretations and ideas analyzed in the previous chapters. The synthesis of the previous chapters is expected to examine the validity of the hypotheses presented at the beginning of the research and answer the questions related to the different perspectives influencing the construction of female identities in the fiction of Toni Morrison.

2 Theoretical perspectives on female identity in black studies

2.1 The concept of identity construction

The concepts "identity," "female identity," and the possibility of "constructing" it have been tackled by many scholars in an attempt to find a suitable definition and explore the meaning of the terms. The concept of "identity" has significantly been discussed as it represents one of the key concepts in social sciences. Historically, the interpretation of the concept of identity has changed dramatically from perceiving it as stable and whole in ancient Greek philosophy to perceiving identity as fragmented, fluid, and changeable. The changes in understanding the concept of identity began in the 17th century and John Locke's thoughts on the continuity of identity. Namely, the 17th century is known as the period of the Scientific Revolution when a radical change in scientific understanding happened, from the traditional Greek worldview that dominated the scientific world for almost 2,000 years to a new understanding of nature using scientific methods. Moving forward to the 20th century, the concept of identity was studied within the realm of cultural studies and psychology as these social sciences became more prominent among scientists. Due to scientific advancements, modern identity theoreticians can discuss identity as a construct as they are aware that identity is not an innate quality or a naturally given category but a constantly changing and evolving product of historical, social, and cultural circumstances.

It is known that ideas pertaining to this term were the subject of ancient Greek philosophers' thoughts; Plutarch mentions Heraclitus' famous statement: "According to Heraclitus, one cannot step twice into the same river, nor can one grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but by the intensity and the rapidity of change it scatters and again gathers. […] it forms and dissolves, and approaches and departs" (qtd in Kahn, 1979: 168). Heraclitus emphasizes the importance of change; because the river is constantly flowing, it is not possible to step twice into it, although it appears to be the same river all the time. Heraclitus seems to suggest that the same can be applied to a human identity that is in a lifelong state of flux. Heraclitus' thoughts on the subject were considered radical at the time, as most philosophers believed that the self was linked to the concept of the soul. However, Heraclitus' influence has evidently been overwhelming, as it, according to the professor of philosophy, André Gallois, changed Plato's mind: "Despite regarding the self as being potentially in touch with the unchanging forms, he seems to take in the *Symposium* a surprisingly Heraclitian view of the self – that is, seeing the self as an ever-changing succession of psychological states" (2017: 22).

Moving forward to the 17th century, it is paramount to mention the English philosopher John Locke who analyzes the concept of identity in great detail in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). Locke discusses the identity of plants, animals, and people and insists that each identity is unique, emphasizing that it is based on continuity and shaped by experiences: "This also shows wherein the identity of the same man consists; viz. in nothing but a participation of the same continued life, by constantly fleeting particles of matter, in succession vitally united to the same organized body" (1999: 315). Locke argues that sensations and reflections are two essential aspects of one's identity, and he insists that "Consciousness makes personal identity" (1999: 319) while proposing that consciousness always remains the same while some other physical or metaphysical features of a person, such as the body, brain or soul, might change. However, for consciousness to remain the same, Locke considers it crucial to reflect on the past and memorize past experiences.

When discussing children's identity formation, it is noteworthy to mention Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist and developmental theorist. While Piaget did not explicitly write about identity as his field of interest, he researched and wrote extensively about cognitive

development, which is crucial for identity development, especially when children and adolescents are taken into consideration. Piaget observed that individuals go through four stages of development which include the period when children develop "symbolic and preconceptual thought" (Piaget 2001: 136), the stage when children develop intuitive thinking, the period when children are able to perform "concrete operations" (Piaget 2001: 136) and the final stage when adolescents' thoughts "characterize the completion of reflective intelligence" (Piaget 2001: 136). Piaget considers these four stages of development necessary for children's acquisition of knowledge but also for understanding the nature of intelligence. However, apart from stages of development, Piaget considered social factors to be of great importance for intellectual development, as he claims that society: "[…] changes the very structure of the individual, because it not only compels him to recognize facts, but also provides him with a ready-made system of signs, which modify his thought; it presents him with new values and it imposes on him an infinite series of obligations" (Piaget 2001: 171). Society and social interactions with community members are highly significant for developing a sense of self, as they introduce individuals to societal rules and new perspectives and help them develop their thinking skills.

Discussing relevant theorists who wrote and thought about the concept of identity in the 20th century, it is vital to mention Erik H. Erikson, a prominent developmental psychologist and psychiatrist who coined the term "identity crisis" and who insightfully comments on the challenges in understanding the term "identity": "[…] why the problem is so all-pervasive and yet so hard to grasp: for we deal with a process "located*" in the core of the individual* and yet also *in the core of his communal culture*, a process which establishes, in fact, the identity of those two identities" (1994: 22). Therefore, the identity problem is twofold; it comprises the individual identity that develops independently of outside influences, and collective identity that is closely connected to the community that people are associated with. Both identity aspects are essential and have a crucial role in healthy identity formation.

Continuing the concerted discussion, Erikson explains the notion of identity construction in the following manner: "It is an active tension (rather than a paralyzing question) – a tension which, furthermore, must create a challenge "without guaranty" rather than one dissipated in a clamor for certainty" (1994: 20). Understood in this way, construction of identity includes the quest that lasts throughout people's lives, and it does not necessarily succeed. Erikson emphasizes that identity development is a lifelong mission fraught with challenges. He further adds to the discussion: "[…] the process described is always changing and developing: at its best it is a process of increasing differentiation, and it becomes even more inclusive as the individual grows aware of a widening circle of others significant to him…" (1994:23). Identity development is an evolving and altering process, that passes through various phases (Erikson lists eight stages of psychosocial development in his book *Childhood and Society* (1993) that an individual goes through from infancy to adulthood). In his idea that identity construction is an ever-changing activity, it appears that Erikson agrees with John Locke's views on the continuity of identity.

Furthermore, Erikson mentions the relationship with and dependence on dominant culture as an important aspect of identity formation: "It dawns on us, then, that one person's or group's identity may be relative to another's, and that the pride of gaining a strong identity may signify an inner emancipation from a more dominant group identity, such as that of the "compact majority" (1994: 21). Erikson highlights the importance of developing a strong sense of identity in order to become independent from the dominant culture. The influence of the dominant culture might seem inescapable. Still, it is necessary to resist it on the road to self-discovery in order to grow into a mentally healthy individual, especially if adverse racial, gender, social, and class circumstances define the dominant culture, as is the case in Morrison's novels. Additionally, according to Erikson, the process of individuation is tightly linked to the

perception of an individual: "[…] by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them…" (1994: 22). The manner in which others perceive an individual affects the identity development drastically. Whether the judgment and perception of individuals stem from the "white gaze," "male gaze," or discriminatory practices, these impact the psychological processes which are of vital importance for the development of identity and which might have severe repercussions, such as the racial self-loathing, the feeling of insecurity, and internalized racism.

Erikson's identity theory places particular emphasis on the existence of an identity crisis that happens in adolescence and young adulthood. He explains that it is of crucial importance for one's personal development to experience an identity crisis:

> […] the conflicts, inner and outer, which the vital personality weathers, re-emerging from each crisis with an increased sense of inner unity, with an increase of good judgment, and an increase in the capacity "to do well" according to his own standards and to the standards of those who are significant to him (1994: 92).

Erikson describes the ordeal of passing through an identity crisis which includes several challenges that encourage the individual to explore various possibilities of what they would do and which roles they would like to assume in the future, a period which might have grave consequences if not done appropriately, as passing through an identity crisis should provide an individual with a sense of purpose and help him to grow into a healthy human being when psychological life is taken into consideration.

In the discussion of identity, Lawrence Kohlberg, an American psychologist best known for his theory of moral development, adds a relevant perspective on identity formation. Kohlberg claims that a sense of self is closely related to ethical decisions: "If the norms and laws of our society may be seen to be culturally relative, youth can question the validity or obligatory quality of all moral norms and see the egoistic or hedonistic self as having a point of view as valid or more valid than that of social (or conventional) morality" (1984: 5) Kohlberg believes that moral development is a crucial aspect of identity formation and that individuals need to develop an understanding whether a particular behavior is right or wrong and establish a set of moral values.

In the 20th century, the concept of identity was also studied from cultural and social perspectives, and cultural theorist and sociologist Stuart Hall contributed significantly to the field of identity theory with his insights. Hall considers specific political and cultural contexts significant for one's identity development and proposes two ways of viewing cultural identity. First, Hall recognizes the existence of collective cultural identities which "[…] 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" (1990: 223). The collective cultural identity accounts for a sense of community, as it instills the members of the community with solidarity and a feeling of shared historical struggles and cultural heritage. Hall also mentions the "loss of identity" (1990: 224), which happens in cases of unfavorable historical circumstances, such as slavery, migration, colonization, and many other forms of oppression, as these inevitably lead to loss of connection to culture and ancestry.

Moreover, Hall explains the second meaning of cultural identity: "Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being.' It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture" (1990: 225). Hall emphasizes the nature of identity that is constantly transforming

and changing. While the past experiences do impact one's identity, it is not determined solely by the past but by a variety of past and present experiences, including cultural and historical influences. Hall makes another relevant observation about identity: "[…] we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (1990: 222). Hall points to identity's fluid and dynamic nature, suggesting that identity keeps altering through experiences and social and cultural interactions.

When it comes to modern identity theoreticians, Florian Coulmas, a German linguist and author, has made relevant contributions to identity theory by pinpointing the importance of language and its intersection with culture and identity. Additionally, Coulmas remarks on the importance of personal names: "Names have a strong link to their bearers' identities, like trademarks that have to be registered for ownership to be secured" (2019: 98). Names indicate the vital link to one's family and ancestors. Still, they also represent important individual traits as names serve as distinguishing features when an individual is compared to others. Denying a personal name to an individual or not allowing the individual to carry the family name might negate one's identity. In this way, individuals lose their connection with their ancestors and are forced to take on the name somebody else gives them, thus allowing them to interfere with an essential aspect of their self-definition. The prime example of such identity annihilation is the period of slavery when slaveowners deprived slaves of their family names.

Florian Coulmas draws attention to another important notion in connection with identity: "Ethnic identity is acquired at birth. The legacy of the group into which they are born is inherited by newborns by fate, forming the only reality they know for some time" (2019: 29). Ethnic identity is an integral part of every person's identity as people usually have an intrinsic desire to know where they are from and what community they belong to. However, when it comes to black people, ethnicity proves to be a complex phenomenon, as their roots are African, but they were forcefully transported to the United States, which became their new home and where the new generations of black people were born and raised without any remembrance of the home of their ancestors. In his discussion on ethnic identity, Coulmas includes a notable example of a writer Inua Ellams. Ellams is originally from Nigeria, where the issue of race was never considered important enough to be a topic of discussion. However, when he moved to England, he faced a different environment. Coulmas explains: "It had no important role in the formation of his identity; in England, it became a central part of it" (2019: 27). When Ellams moved to a country with a predominantly white population, the color of his skin seemed relevant, and thus he became acutely aware of it and understood that racial identity was a crucial aspect of one's personality in England.

When tackling the ethnic identity of black people, one of the prominent issues is the disagreement between how black people perceive themselves and how others perceive them. Coulmas sheds light on the significant differentiation: "An important distinction in any discussion of ethnic identity is between *asserted* and *ascribed* identity, which comes to the fore whenever one does not match the other" (2019: 31). Black people's asserted identity seems to be connected to their willingness to be properly assimilated into the American culture all the while respecting their African origin. Nevertheless, the identity that is ascribed to black people on behalf of the dominant white tradition emphasizes the opinion that they are foreigners who have not yet deserved the status of Americans. The differentiation between these two aspects of identity might cause significant obstacles on black people's road to self-discovery, including feelings of ethnic insecurity, national and racial self-hatred, and the development of identity crises.

In his discussion on elements that might cause conflicts with identity formation, Coulmas also mentions stigmas: "Stigmas are characteristics that are socially devalued and used to ostracize, marginalize, and in the extreme case dehumanize groups" (2019: 72).

Stigmas are highly detrimental to one's identity formation as they represent the socially accepted terms that are used to mark the marginalized groups and thus emphasize their difference in comparison to dominant groups. When black people are taken into consideration, stigmas also contribute to the negative self-image that many black people develop, believing they are inferior as they do not fit into the predetermined concepts regarding beauty, intelligence, and superiority established by dominant white tradition. Coulmas provides a detailed description of stigmas, explaining that they can be divided into visible and invisible stigmas: "Skin colour, physical disabilities, and age are obvious examples of visible stigmas, which typically, much as they would like, people cannot conceal. Invisible stigmas include mental illness, being LGBT, and one's family background" (2019: 73). When applied to black women, visible stigmas that reveal that they are marginalized categories are the color of their skin and gender. White people's discriminatory treatment of black people and the usage of derogatory names when addressing and defining them are based on visible stigmas. On the other hand, invisible stigmas include internalized racism and the adoption of the "white gaze" and "male gaze" among the members of the black community. Stigmas might have a detrimental influence on one's identity development which is why it is important to be aware of their power and effect.

Another modern theoretician who provides a valuable framework for gaining a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of identity is Roz Ivanič, who claims: "[…] the self consists not of a person's life-history, but of the *interpretation* they are currently putting on their life history. The self is in this way doubly socially constructed…" (1998: 16). Ivanič proposes that one's interpretation and understanding of life events are equally important as these events themselves. Since people have unique characteristics and do not respond to life circumstances similarly, different experiences will affect people differently, thus shaping their identity distinctly. Ivanič further emphasizes that she is a proponent of a social constructionist view of identity: "But identity is not socially *determined* but socially *constructed*. This means that the possibilities for the self are not fixed, but open to contestation and change" (1998: 12). This interpretation of identity places particular emphasis on social context, but also implies that individuation process changes as social circumstances change. In this way, Ivanič continues the tradition of Locke and Erikson's thoughts on the continuity of identity, as they also described identity development as a constantly evolving and transforming process. However, Ivanič insightfully observes that people are rarely aware of the perpetuating nature of identity formation, although it is known to be a constant process: "In spite of the fact that identities are not fixed, individuals have a sense of unity and continuity about their identity" (1998: 16).

When discussing contemporary identity theoreticians, it is necessary to mention Kevin Everod Quashie, who focuses on black feminism in his teaching and publishing work and sheds light on many important issues pertaining to women in his thoughts on identity. Quashie emphasizes motherhood as one of the crucial aspects of female identity construction, explaining the complex implications of it: "Hence, motherhood is a site of tension between individual women, on one hand, and cultural and national communities, on the other" (2004: 65). While all women's decisions about motherhood should be deeply personal, Quashie proposes that the community and cultural and social influences have a significant impact on the female psyche and thus can impede female journey toward self-discovery. Commonly, communities driven by patriarchal rules and traditional values instill feelings of obligation and inadequacy into women who choose a path different from what is considered appropriate by patriarchal institutions.

Another point that should be considered when conversing about female identity development is the importance of female friendships. Quashie keenly observes: "[…] the notion of being girlfriends, upon which the identification depends, is rooted in a political,

ethical, and spiritual solidarity, not only a solidarity based on being, in some essentialist social order, a Black woman" (2004: 35). Solidarity between girlfriends, support and reliance, and the mutual understanding of all the difficulties of belonging to marginalized categories equip women with strength on their pathway to self-discovery. Female friendships are significant in the black tradition, where black women experienced oppression along racial, gender, and class lines. The consequences of such oppression often included feelings of insecurity, creating a negative self-image, and internalized racism.

When it comes to factors that might threaten the identity of black people, historical trauma is one of the most influential factors, as it encompasses the previously mentioned racial, gender, and class oppression, but also many forms of physical and psychological abuse. Quashie thoroughly explains its impact on identity:

> Although colonization interferes with memory, it does not as much prevent memory as it uses memory to reinvent narratives (memories) that colonized subjects accept, revise, remember, and pass on. That memory sometimes works against itself is one of the ways that it can colonize a subject, can interfere with a subject's process of selfhood (2004: 108).

Traumatized past is a fundamental aspect of black people's lives, mainly because it includes atrocities of slavery, deprivation of human rights, and forced transport from the homeland. Colonization and its negative consequences shape black people's identities, and the memories connected with these unfortunate events are passed on to future generations. In this way, historical trauma also interferes with the individuation process of younger generations of black people who do not even have firsthand experience of slavery. Another critical point that Quashie draws attention to is that traumatized people do not always remember the harrowing experiences in the way that they occurred; sometimes, the individuals who experienced trauma embellish it or omit parts of it to be able to live with it and accept it.

On the subject of identity development, Quashie adds another perspective worthy of discussion when he says: "[…] there is no "I" without an/other…" (2004: 31). While it is true that the perception of other people in the form of "white gaze" or "male gaze" might harm and threaten identity formation, it is also relevant to acknowledge that they are impossible to avoid and that they might have a positive effect. The perception of an individual by others can be beneficial if the individual works towards building a stronger sense of self and developing a feeling of racial pride rather than accepting the view of themselves that others have created. It is also possible to interpret the quote in another way and infer that individuals cannot move forward on their journey toward self-discovery without the presence of "others": family, friends, and the community. The support and guidance of other people help build a strong sense of identity and might provide help when identity is threatened. Bearing this in mind, the positive and negative influence of the "other" might help an individual reach self-actualization.

Judith Butler, an American philosopher and gender studies writer, also makes valuable contributions to the field of identity theory. Butler considers the discussion on identity inseparable from the discussion on gender identity. Butler expresses her interpretation: "Inasmuch as "identity" is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of "the person" is called into question by the cultural emergence of those "incoherent" or "discontinuous" gendered beings…" (1999: 23). Butler suggests that identity is not stable and fixed, but it is constantly being changed and constructed through social and cultural interactions.

Another theoretician who emphasizes the importance of gender is Carol Gilligan, an American feminist and psychologist who criticizes traditional psychological theories as they were based entirely on studying male experiences and hence neglect women's unique

experiences and points of view. Gilligan argues that the male individuation process is closely connected to separation from a mother, while the same is not the case for girls and women: "Since masculinity is defined through separation while femininity is defined through attachment, male gender identity is threatened by intimacy while female gender identity is threatened by separation" (2003: 8). Gilligan claims that relationships and intimacy might cause obstacles on the male road toward self-actualization, while disconnection and detachment might cause barriers in case of females. Additionally, Gilligan remarks that women are much more committed to maintaining social and personal interactions, which further contributes to women's inability to disconnect from others without consequences on their sense of self: "Women's failure to separate then becomes by definition a failure to develop" (2003: 9).

When it comes to the identity construction of female characters in Toni Morrison's fiction, the novels explore the confluence of factors that make the journey toward self-discovery challenging and complex. As noted by Patricia Hill Collins, "Identity is not the goal but rather the point of departure in the process of self-definition. In this process Black women journey toward an understanding of how our personal lives have been fundamentally shaped by intersecting oppressions of race, gender, sexuality, and class" (2000: 113). On this pathway toward self-definition, female characters face racial discrimination, social and political oppression, racial violence, gender and class divisions, extreme circumstances, impoverished conditions, and many other obstacles. Still, Morrison's characters illustrate that conditions and circumstances are just fragments in identity quests and that the community, family, individual personality traits, and mental state, all have a part to play. Any of these factors or categories might threaten an individual's identity at some point in life. Erikson lists the symptoms that one might feel in case of an identity crisis: "[…] pain, anxiety, and panic. They warn of the danger of organic dysfunction, of impairment of ego mastery, and of loss of group identity; but each signal announces a threat to all" (1994: 73). Both individual and collective identity might be threatened when individuals are faced with traumatic experiences. Whether temporary or permanent, traumatic circumstances impede female characters' identity development. Throughout the selected novels, Morrison explores various ways that characters attempt to deal with and overcome them.

Regarding the importance of writing about complexities of identity development, Erikson comments: "But the responsible Negro writers continue to write and write strongly, for fiction even in acknowledging the depth of nothingness can contribute to something akin to a collective recovery. This, as we shall see, is a universal trend among the exploited" (1994: 25). Erikson believes that the act of writing and reminding people of all the struggles black people have had to endure on their journey toward self-actualization might aid other oppressed groups in shaping a stronger collective identity. Since Morrison illustrates that the intersection of various factors accounts for one's identity formation, it appears necessary to include multiple perspectives when embarking on the task of exploration of female identity construction in Toni Morrison's fiction.

2.2 The importance of an intersectional framework

Exploring the construction of female identity using an intersectional framework includes acknowledging multiple aspects of one's identity that are inextricably linked and whose interplay and intersection account for complex experiences on one's journey toward self-discovery. Analysis of a single social aspect of identity, such as race, gender, or class, will not provide enough insight into all the complexities of the individuation process, as identity development cannot be attributed to a particular social construct, but it is the product and result of various perspectives that are intertwined.

Regarding the coinage of the term "intersectionality," it is essential to mention Kimberlé Crenshaw, a distinguished scholar and writer on civil rights and critical race theory who coined this term in her essay *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. Crenshaw highlights the importance of the intersectional approach: "Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" (1989: 140). Crenshaw infers the metaphorical meaning of the word "intersection" from its literal meaning from the traffic vocabulary; she claims that traffic accidents at intersections might happen because of one car only or because of a few of them. Taking the metaphorical meaning of the word into consideration, a black woman's identity might be threatened because of one social construct only or because of the intersection of social constructs, which is why it is necessary to incorporate the intersection of all the relevant perspectives when analyzing the challenges on black women's road to self-discovery.

In their book *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology,* prominent academics Margaret L. Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins discuss the interconnectedness of various perspectives and how it influences identity problems. Anderson and Hill Collins employ the term "matrix of domination" when analyzing interrelated factors: "A matrix of domination sees social structure as having multiple, interlocking levels of domination that stem from the societal configuration of race, class, and gender relations" (2016: 4). Race, class, and gender are notions that establish dominant categories in societies, and these parameters affect both the individual and collective identities. However, these terms are relative, and the level of dominance might change when different categories are taken into consideration. Anderson and Collins provide examples of black men being privileged compared to black women. Nevertheless, compared to other male figures based on class or race, they do not appear so privileged. Therefore, it is necessary to employ intersectional analysis and observe identity formation through the interconnectedness of different perspectives.

Anderson and Collins emphasize that black women seem to suffer "the triple oppression" (2016: 7), as they are discriminated against on racial, gender, and class grounds. Anderson and Collins refer to these three concepts as "systems of power" (2016: 2) that establish white people as the most dominant category in society. With regard to systems of power, the two authors insist that it is important to analyze people on both sides when it comes to oppression and discrimination, not just those who are oppressed and discriminated against, but also those who are privileged and in possession of social power. Anderson and Collins shed light on the binary oppositions that these systems of power create: "Some approaches to difference place people in either/or categories as if one is either Black or White, oppressed or oppressor, powerful or powerless, normal or different when few of us fit neatly into any of these restrictive categories" (2016: 7). Dichotomous categories imply that people shall be described only in terms of binary oppositions which are limiting and which allow a negative categorization of black people who are consequently described as "Black," "poor," "powerless." These dichotomous categories influence the individual and collective sense of identity and account for societal inequality.

When it comes to the relevance of intersectionality, Patricia Hill Collins believes that it should be considered a critical social theory. She asserts that intersectionality should be employed in observing and analyzing social inequalities, as there is a confluence of factors that cause inequality and discrimination, and these should not be studied as isolated categories but as an interplay of aspects that influence one another. Collins believes that another reason why it is necessary to study intersectionality is to defy the manipulation of specific terms: ""Race" meant Black people, "gender" meant women, and "class" meant poor people. Yet race/class/gender never argued that its concepts were confined to subordinated people – it was

perfectly capable of studying privilege within the categories of race, class, and gender" (2019: 39). The terms "race," "class," and "gender" are wrongly associated with the people who are considered to be underprivileged in these categories. Consequently, employing an intersectional approach when studying these categories and their influence on one's identity is of great importance to shed light on the fact that these are social constructs and defy the wrong association of these terms with those oppressed by society.

On the subject of the relevance of intersectional approach for identity questions, Bonnie Thornton Dill and Ruth Enid Zambrana, eminent feminist scholars, explain: "Both individual and group identity are complex – influenced and shaped not simply by a person's race, class, ethnicity, gender, physical ability, sexuality, religion, or nationality – but by a combination of all of those characteristics" (2009: 6). Analyzing one's identity construction is a complex undertaking, as the concept of identity is shaped and affected by a confluence of relevant factors that should be explored both on their own and in an intersectional manner. Therefore, employing an intersectional approach when investigating the complex question of female identity formation is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the interplay of essential perspectives on identity development. This dissertation will explore the intersection of historical, political, social, black feminist, narratological, and psychoanalytical perspectives, including trauma studies, and their impact on female identity construction.

2.3 Historical and political perspectives

Critical analysis of the construction and crisis of female identity is inextricably entwined with historical and political perspectives. The institution of slavery has undoubtedly been one of the most embarrassing moments of American history, and the horrendous and disturbing physical and psychological consequences of racism and discrimination did not cease to exist even after the abolition of slavery. The dehumanizing treatment of enslaved people provokes shock and astonishment even when discussed at the present moment. However, William Howard Russell, a reporter and war correspondent, insists that it is undeniable that slavery helped massive economic and industrial growth in the United States:

> […] the real foundation of slavery in the Southern states lies in the power of obtaining labor at will at a rate which cannot be controlled by any combination of the laborers. Granting the heat and the malaria, it is not for a moment to be argued that planters could not find white men to do their work if they would pay them for the risk. A negro, it is true, bears heat well, and can toil under the blazing sun of Louisiana, in the stifling air between the thick-set sugarcanes; (1863: 271).

Cheap labor, the physical strength of black people, and the fear white people instilled in them make black people the clearest choice regarding back-breaking physical labor. What additionally worked to the advantage of white slaveowners were the laws that enabled them to legally use and abuse enslaved people and even benefit from the enslaved women's ability to give birth and thus obtain new slaves. All these facts explain why slavery persisted in the United States for a long time.

American historian Milton Meltzer defined the term "slave" in the following manner: "A slave, then, is a man who is the property of another. Property is something owned – land, goods, money – that to which a person has legal title. And the owner has the exclusive rights to possess, enjoy and dispose of his property" (1971: 3). Enslaved people are subjected to complete dominion over their bodies, personalities, and character. They have no legal rights and no rights at all when it comes to willpower, life choices, and self-definition. Slavery is a

complete negation of a person and the moral destruction of identity. The issue is further exacerbated when gender roles are taken into consideration. Women were expected to perform the same kind and amount of work as men. Still, at times they were considered superior regarding reproductive exploitation and their ability to bring more enslaved children into the world. Additionally, they were constantly subjected to sexual abuse and violence. American professor Greg Forter offers a coherent explanation of everything that slavery inflicts on women: "It not only robs them of self-ownership, coerces their labor, and physically brutalizes them – all of which it does to men – but *also* soils and degrades their self-conception by compelling them to be mothers while thwarting their effort at maternal love" (2014: 79). Female slaves are forced into sexual relations, and they are encouraged to give birth to as many children as possible while they are deprived of the actual possibility to perform the role of a mother and nurture their children. Slavery violated not only their bodies but also their emotions, characteristics, and abilities. As stated by Patricia Hill Collins, "Chattel slavery also relied upon gender oppression" (2004: 55). Oppression, exploitation, and physical and psychological abuse manifest differently in men and women due to women's reproductive abilities. Angela Y Davis, a prominent activist, academic, and author, comments on the most potent weapon that slaveholders used: "Rape was a weapon of domination, a weapon of repression, whose covert goal was to extinguish slave women's will to resist, as in the process, to demoralize their men" (1982: 23). By raping black women, white slaveowners degraded both black women and men; the sexual exploitation of women illustrated that women had no control of their bodies whatsoever. However, it simultaneously emasculated black men by forcing them to witness the sexual exploitation of their partners, mothers, sisters, and friends while powerless to protect them.

Analyzing the use of violence as means of maintaining the institution of patriarchy, bell hooks makes a shrewd observation: "[…] it is the Western philosophical notion of hierarchical rule and coercive authority that is the root cause of violence against women, of adult violence against children, of all violence between those who dominate and those who are dominated" (1984: 118). Violence is employed as a tool to control, oppress, and exert power and influence over those who occupy a lower social position in society. In this way, violence is closely related to patriarchal beliefs, as violence is imposed by those who are more powerful – white people, men, and parents, on those who have no power at all – black people, women, and children. Violence has been a significant part of black people's lives, as they suffered physical and psychological violence during slavery. Still, violence has also colored black people's lives after slavery, as evidenced in Morrison's novels.

Regarding the instances of black-on-black violence, Alice Walker, a social activist and novelist, mentions in her book that many black men display aggression toward the members of their families, probably as a reaction to the widespread violence directed at black people. In Alice Walker's interview with Martin Luther King's wife, she expressed admiration that King had never been violent with his wife and children despite all the violence he personally experienced: "I tell her how important I feel this is: that black men not take out their anger and frustration on their wives and children. A temptation that is all too obvious" (1984: 151). In Morrison's novels, there are examples of black men transferring their aggression from the actual culprits to women and children, thus wishing to prove to themselves that they are still able to exercise male authority, even though it is exercised upon those weaker than them and those that are oppressed to a more considerable extent than black men are.

On the other hand, Barbara Omolade, a scholar who specialized in black and women's issues, sheds light on black men's feelings regarding their powerlessness to protect women from both physical and psychological forms of abuse: "Black men felt outrage and shame at their frequent inability to protect black women, not merely from the whippings and hard work, but also from the master/lover's touch" (1995: 371). While it was definitely highly distressing

for women to suffer through and endure constant oppression, it was also burdensome for black men to witness that and not be able to provide shelter and protection for their partners, sisters, mothers, daughters, and other important women in their life.

When it comes to the representation of history in literature, literature has often been used as a medium to depict people's emotions, thoughts, and personal experiences while going through a challenging historical period. In Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved*, Morrison incorporates the newspaper report about Margaret Garner, a mother who killed her two-year-old daughter rather than have her return to slavery. Most people reading this report in the 1860s felt terrified and shocked about the monstrous crime. However, Morrison's fictional account based on the true story provides confession, explanations, and justification of the female character who committed infanticide, thus giving a voice to those who were previously voiceless due to oppression and discriminatory practices.

Nevertheless, despite the astonishment and shock that most people felt when the newspaper article about Margaret Garner was published, the notion of changing audiences should also be addressed when discussing this matter. Today's audiences would not be expected to be as judgmental as those living in the 1860s in the USA, especially after Adrienne Rich's publication of *Of Woman Born* and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in the seventies. Adrienne Rich was an American poet, essayist, and feminist whose criticism was focused on challenging patriarchal traditions and arguing for the inclusion of women's voices and perspectives. In her work, Rich criticizes the patriarchal society that attempts to control women's lives:

> Patriarchy is the power of the fathers: a familial-social, ideological, political system in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male (1986: 57).

Rich exposed patriarchy as directed against women while employing various methods to ensure women remained inferior. Patriarchy is a complex system that utilizes politics, traditional and religious beliefs, and legal laws to maintain the gender hierarchy. Maintaining patriarchal institutions is paramount for establishing dominion over a particular group of people; patriarchal institutions have therefore been used by those in power to control and exercise authority over women to ensure their submissiveness.

Furthermore, Betty Friedan was an American feminist writer and women's rights activist who criticized traditional gender roles attributed to women that expected women to be mothers, wives, and housewives. Friedan bravely discussed the identity crisis occurring in women's lives as they felt that their purpose was not solely tied to the roles of homemakers and mothers. Friedan encouraged women to consider their position in society with regard to men: "Today, when women's equal intelligence has been proved by science, when their equal capacity in every sphere except sheer muscular strength has been demonstrated, a theory explicitly based on woman's natural inferiority would seem as ridiculous as it is hypocritical" (1974: 110). Friedan emphasizes women's equality with men and thus threatens the patriarchal belief that men are superior to women, advocating women's ability to obtain an education, find jobs, and realize their full potential outside of the limited confinements of patriarchy.

Nevertheless, despite Rich and Friedan's admirable feminist activity, it is noteworthy to mention that they failed to tackle the plight of other oppressed groups, such as non-white, non-middle class, non-heterosexual, etc. Their work remained within the realm of white women's oppressed positions and criticism of patriarchy pertaining to white women, disregarding the negative influence of patriarchal institutions on other oppressed categories in

society. Still, it is vital to praise Rich and Friedan's work for changing public opinion when it comes to patriarchy and gender roles, thus inspiring women to break free from social constraints and to observe woman's position in challenging historical circumstances differently.

Regarding Morrison's incorporation of historical context in her novels, it is evident that *Beloved* is most prominently tied to historical circumstances as the novel resonates the period of slavery and its aftermath. However, the historical narratives are significant for developing female identity in other novels. *Sula*, set after World War I, shows how racist tendencies and discrimination influenced the construction of female identity long after the war and slavery had ended. In *Tar Baby*, racial and class disparity pervades women's lives and illustrates that historical circumstances also color the lives of younger generations of black people.

In the following chapters, the research will attempt to present the relevance of historical context and the far-reaching and atrocious consequences of slavery and discrimination in the novels written by Toni Morrison. It will also observe the events and traumatic experiences that marked female characters' lives in order to comprehend the female identity crises through trauma. By incorporating history into her work, Morrison offers personal stories and personalized histories of those involved in significant historical events.

When discussing major historical events that shaped people's lives, it is necessary to mention the political systems, as they are the ones that granted the power to individuals and that allowed for important historical events to take place. Judith Butler discusses the negative aspects of the political systems: "Juridical notions of power appear to regulate political life in purely negative terms – that is, through the limitation, prohibition, regulation, control, and even "protection" of individuals related to that political structure through the contingent and retractable operation of choice" (1999: 4). Butler pinpoints the irony lurking behind the supposed purpose of the political systems – while they are supposed to ensure equality and guarantee human rights, they actually cause limitation and exercise authority and control over the marginalized societal categories. An example of such a negative operation of political systems is evident in the institution of slavery, as the political system made slavery legal by passing laws that allowed the degrading and inhuman treatment of black people.

When it comes to the white people's justification of the existence of the institution of slavery, Patricia Hill Collins notes that white people did not perceive black people as human beings but as animals: "Animals are promiscuous because they lack intellect, culture, and civilization" (2004: 100). In this way, they rationalized their brutal and cruel actions toward black people by blaming the animal features that black people supposedly possessed. Black men were considered to be "beasts" that were "inherently violent, hyper-heterosexual, and in need of discipline" (Hill Collins 2004: 158), while women were perceived to be promiscuous, inferior, and uneducated. Since the political system did not recognize and acknowledge black people as humans, specific laws did not apply to them. Collins exemplifies: "Ironically, even though Black people were also murdered and raped under chattel slavery, these crimes were not labeled lynching or rape" (2000: 64). White people manipulated the laws and used them to their advantage; on the one hand, they used the laws to allow the possession of slaves legally; on the other hand, they denied black people citizenship rights that would offer them legal protection. In addition, even though slavery legally ended in 1865, racial disparity, oppression of black people, and discriminatory practices persisted in matters related to the job and educational opportunities, financial compensation for labor, and the general perception of black people. Collins comments on the perpetuating forms of discrimination against oppressed groups:

> […] despite the U.S. Constitution's stated commitment to equality of all American citizens, historically, the different treatment of U.S. Blacks, women,

> the working class, and other subordinated groups meant that the United States operated as a nation-state that disproportionately benefited affluent White men (2000: 229).

It is ironic that the United States of America proudly advertises its ideas of equality and the possibility of all citizens to achieve the American Dream and become wealthy and successful regardless of their background, while at the same time, white people are the ones who control the government and even today, almost two centuries after the abolition of slavery, people astonishingly welcome the news on the first black president, the first female black vice-president, and the first black female justice on US Supreme Court. On top of that, the best testament to black women's deprivation of legal rights is the fact that black men were granted voting rights in 1868, while black women waited for this privilege until 1920 (Collins 1998), which additionally emphasizes the triple oppression of black women that was mentioned earlier, as they occupy the bottom position of the racial, gender, and social hierarchies.

2.4 Social perspective

With regard to social perspective, the dissertation analyzes various manners in which social conditions hinder the development of female identity, emphasizing the perplexing questions of patriarchal expectations and traditions and oppressive social order. Carol Gilligan, a psychologist, and Naomi Snider, a psychoanalyst, who deal with social injustice and ethics, adequately define the term "patriarchy," explaining that the term incorporates two aspects. The cultural aspect includes the following meaning: "As a culture then, patriarchy exists as a set of rules and values, codes and scripts that specify how men and women should act and be in the world" (Gilligan and Snider 2018: 4). The cultural aspect acts externally, by establishing patriarchal gender roles that expect a woman to be a housewife and a mother, while a man should be a protector and provider. Gilligan and Snider also mention the psychological aspect of patriarchy: "More insidiously, patriarchy also exists internally, shaping how we think and feel, how we perceive and judge ourselves, our desires, our relationships and the world we live in" (2018: 4). Psychological aspect affects women internally, as they are usually brought up in families that teach them patriarchal values and expectations that they feel obliged to fulfill. Still, Gilligan and Snider emphasize that the psychological aspect might take primacy over the cultural one: "Moreover, these two aspects, the cultural and psychological, often exist in a state of tension: we can unconsciously absorb and reify a framework that we consciously and actively oppose" (2018: 5). While women might defy the patriarchal roles that society imposes on them, they might subconsciously feel the obligation to fulfill them in order to show respect to their family and community and to avoid criticism. In this way, it can be concluded that patriarchy, as a set of predetermined concepts that men and women ought to implement in their lives, influences individuals both internally and externally, and the wish to comply with patriarchal expectations might impede identity development.

Discussing the pressures that women feel obliged to achieve, including the gender roles assigned to them by patriarchal societies, Betty Friedan warns of potential dangers if girls and women allow traditional expectations to control their lives: "[…] these girls are doomed to suffer ultimately that bored, diffuse feeling of purposefulness, non-existence, non-involvement with the world that can be called *anomie*, or lack of identity, or merely felt as the problem that has no name" (1974: 172). Friedan insists that women must break free from expected gender roles on their path toward self-actualization. Friedan even uses hyperbole in her work to get her message across and compares the lives of homemakers to the lives of captives in Nazi concentration camps, claiming their state of mind was in a similar place. Friedan believes that women should not rely on others – the community, family, husband, and children, on their road

to self-discovery but that they need to embark on a quest to discover their purpose alone while discovering their desires, hopes, and expectations for the future.

However, it is important to emphasize that Friedan describes white women and their struggles while she does not consider additional problems surrounding black women's lives. According to Bonnie Thornton Dill, "Unlike white women, racial-ethnic women experienced the oppression of a patriarchal society but were denied the protections and buffering of a patriarchal family. Their families suffered as a direct result of the organization of the labor systems in which they participated" (2016: 296). In the period of slavery, black women were denied the patriarchal roles of wife and mother since they were not allowed to start families. However, the institution of slavery simultaneously took advantage of black women's gender roles by forcing them into getting pregnant so that they would provide the next generation of enslaved people. Therefore, white people manipulated patriarchy for their own benefit. On the other hand, after slavery was abolished, black people were officially allowed to have their families, but the social circumstances that oppressed black people when it came to their educational and job opportunities, wages, and discriminatory practices, made the fulfillment of this patriarchal tradition very challenging for black people.

Continuing the concerted discussion, it is noteworthy to pinpoint the social conditions beyond women's control that prevent women from freeing themselves from patriarchal constraints, thus making their road to self-discovery fraught with difficulties. Joanna Russ, an American writer and feminist, elaborates on the matter: "But it is true that although people are responsible for their actions, they are not responsible for the social context in which they must act or the social resources available to them" (2018: 21). The social circumstances surrounding black women's lives have always been perplexing and problematic, especially if we take into consideration the period of slavery and various forms of oppression and discrimination of black people. As much as they probably wished to do so, black women could not control or affect social conditions, and yet these had an immense influence on their identity construction.

As previously mentioned, Betty Friedan's analysis of women's problems fails to include all the issues pertaining to the lives of black women. Paula Giddings, an American writer and civil rights activist, comments on the inadequacy of Friedan's work: "Not only were the problems of the White suburban housewife (who may have had Black domestic help) irrelevant to Black women, they were also alien to them" (1984: 299). White and black women in the 1970s did not share the same lifestyles. Therefore, their expectations and anxieties were utterly different. Unlike white women who longed for jobs and occupations outside their houses, "Black women expected to have to work, whether they were married or not" (Giddings 1984: 333). Therefore, the societal expectations imposed on black women were difficult to accomplish. They were expected to work, take care of their households, raise children, and put up with discriminatory practices in all aspects of their lives. Furthermore, it is essential to emphasize that black women are not a homogenous group; they have been presented with different social and class conditions and have different opinions about how they would wish to live their lives. The same can be said about white women. Consequently, it is impossible to make generalized conclusions about the impact of patriarchal restrictions on female identity development.

Another social perspective worthy of critical attention is internalized racism which focuses on the hierarchies among black people themselves depending on their social status and shade of their skin color. W.E.B. Du Bois, an American sociologist and civil rights activist, and the first black person who received a Ph.D. from Harvard discusses what he perceives to be the main problem that black people encounter on their road to self-discovery:

> 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 two-ness,--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 (2007: 8).

Du Bois's term "double consciousness" refers to the constant struggle of black people between how others see them and how they perceive themselves. Black people's perception of themselves is highly influenced by the perception of other people who have prejudices and stereotypes about them and consider them to belong to the inferior category in society. The difference between black people's self-image and other people's negative perception of them creates discord and a fragmented self, which results in obstacles on black people's road to self-discovery, both as individuals and as a community. However, Du Bois also believes that there are advantages to possessing "double consciousness," as it allows black people to employ multiple perspectives in their perception of the world and themselves.

Du Bois's term "double consciousness" can be associated with another term that is often used in critical race theory – the "white gaze." bell hooks describes the gaze as "[…] the look that seeks to dominate, subjugate, and colonize. This is especially so for white people looking at and talking about blackness" (2015: 7) White gaze refers to the way how white people observe the world around them, and especially how they perceive people whom they consider to be inferior and unprivileged, such as black people and other oppressed groups. Since white people are often considered the dominant societal category, the white gaze refers to how white perspectives and worldviews dominate mainstream culture and public opinion. bell hooks insightfully observes that "There is power in looking" (2015: 115), and the adoption of the powerful white gaze in people's perception of black people often results in black people developing a feeling of insecurity, racial self-loathing, and internalized racism. However, bell hooks suggests that people can respond to the white gaze with a gaze of their own: "Spaces of agency exist for black people, wherein we can both interrogate the gaze of the Other but also look back, and at one another, naming what we see. The "gaze" has been and is a site of resistance for colonized black people globally." (2015: 116). By showing that the white gaze cannot cause them any harm, black people can perceive people who observe them in such a way with a feeling of racial pride, thus showing that they do not believe in what the white gaze stands for.

George Yancy, an American philosopher, wrote extensively on the topic of the white gaze. He defines the term in the following manner: "[…] "the white racist gaze" is itself a performance, an intervention, a violent form of marking, labeling as different, freakish, animal-like" (2017: 88). Adoption of the white gaze when perceiving black people means employing all the stereotypes that white people created about black people over the course of the long history of slavery which continue up to the present moment. However, Yancy also expresses his opinion that the white gaze is usually associated with men: "[…] the gaze is not simply raced, but gendered, and that many white women do not always feel comfortable in rooms or small spaces with men whom they do not know" (2017: 29). During the period of slavery and in its aftermath, black men were usually considered to be uneducated, dangerous, rapists, and criminals, and many of these stereotypes persisted, which contributed to the creation of a very negative image of black men.

However, it is also necessary to emphasize that white people are not the only ones who adopt the white gaze in their perception of black people; black people very often adopt the white gaze when they perceive other black people whom they consider inferior to themselves based on darker skin color, or social and class position in society; additionally, black people often adopt the white gaze in their perception of themselves through the process of internalized racism, which results in the development of feelings of racial insecurity or self-hatred.

Another important point that should be analyzed when the perception of women is explored is the viewing of women through the "male gaze." In order to understand the power that the male gaze has over women, it is significant to understand what this term entails. Feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey coined the term "male gaze" in the essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975). In the essay, Mulvey discusses the patriarchal power dynamic in the film industry, where the male perspective objectifies women: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (1989: 19). Mulvey's focus on cinematic gender oppression pioneered other scholars' interest in the male gaze.

However, not all scholars agree that sexist and racist oppression are the most prominent issues among black people. According to Doreatha Drummond Mbalia, an English professor specializing in black literature, "It is neither racism nor sexism but capitalism that is the primary enemy of African people" (1991: 21). This is evidenced in the ways that poor black people are treated, not only by white people but by the fellow black people as well. In her novels, Morrison utilizes an array of characters, such as Soaphead Church, Maureen Peal, and Geraldine from *The Bluest Eye*, and Nel's mother from *Sula*, to demonstrate that social stratification and discrimination are not only prominent between the two races but among the member of the black race as well. Morrison highlights how class, rather than gender or patriarchy, determines the relationship between Jadine and Son in *Tar Baby*, the community's betrayal of Sethe in *Beloved*, the peer abuse that Pecola experiences, and Mrs. Breedlove's love and attention that belong to the white, rich girl rather than her own children in *The Bluest Eye*. Regarding the economic problems of black people, Du Bois believes that these are closely connected to racial issues and that their intersection interferes with black people's individuation process: "To-day the ferment of his striving toward self-realization is to the strife of the white world like a wheel within a wheel: beyond the Veil are smaller but like problems of ideals, of leaders and the led, of serfdom, of poverty, of order and subordination, and, through all, the Veil of Race" (2007: 57). Identity formation is a complex phenomenon, and black people, in comparison to white people, have an additional problem – to overcome the racial disparity and discrimination that historical circumstances brought upon them. The racial disparity also meant additional issues for black people, such as the low social position, financial difficulties, and psychological consequences of the traumatic events resulting from a long history of slavery. All these social and historical circumstances drastically affect identity development.

Apart from the severe economic struggles that black people have endured due to slavery and discriminatory practices, the racial disparity also imposed psychological consequences on black people. Du Bois asks the question that many black people asked themselves: "To be sure, behind the thought lurks the afterthought, – suppose, after all, the World is right and we are less than men?" (2007: 64). Racist discrimination creates the feelings of self-doubt and insecurity in individuals as they start acknowledging the negative perception of themselves and this notion of internalized racism might be detrimental to one's sense of self, especially when the period of childhood is taken into account. Nevertheless, Du Bois does not blame white people solely; he considers that black people are partially responsible for the perpetuating unfavorable circumstances they live in. Du Bois notes that black people blame only white people for all the difficulties that they experience: "[…] if he is poor, it is because the white man seizes the fruit of his toil; if he is ignorant, it is because the white man gives him neither time nor facilities to learn; and, indeed, if any misfortune happens to him, it is because of some hidden machinations of "white folks"" (2017: 106). While it is true that white people are responsible for many of the troubles black people suffered, not all the blame should fall upon them. Perhaps Du Bois wishes to suggest that black people should also take responsibility for their actions, especially when it comes to internalized racism and the white gaze they adopt,

not only about themselves, but also when viewing fellow black people, and especially younger generations who, due to their sensitive age, are more prone to developing feelings of insecurity and racial self-hatred.

Another relevant point that should be taken into consideration when investigating the construction of one's identity is the connection of identity to the political questions of origin and belonging. These questions have long burdened black people, as they are not sure which country they belong to, which is an essential aspect of one's ancestral connections and sense of self. As W.E.B. Du Bois skillfully observed:

> No Negro who has given earnest thought to the situation of his people in America has failed, at some time in life, to find himself at these cross-roads; has failed to ask himself at some time: What, after all, am I? Am I an American or am I a Negro? Can I be both? Or is it my duty to cease to be a Negro as soon as possible and be an American? If I strive as a Negro, am I not perpetuating the very cleft that threatens and separates Black and White America? (2007: 184)

Black people seem not to belong anywhere – not to Africa, from which they were forcefully thrown out, and not to the United States, where they were compelled to move, build their lives, and start their families. Their ancestral bonds with Africa have been severed, and the institution of slavery accounted for the fact that the majority of black people in the United States do not remember their native language and do not have any recollection of their cultural heritage and tradition. This puts an overwhelming burden on the collective identity, as black people feel unable to define their origin to themselves and their descendants, who consequently also might experience an identity crisis concerning their cultural identity. However, it is essential to emphasize that black people are an invaluable asset to the country, even though they were long denied their American status. The black population has played an integral part in the industrial and economic power of the United States. Additionally, they contribute to the historical and cultural diversity; they account for the core of America itself, for its proudest feature. The USA has always praised itself for its individualism and for being a family of various races, cultures, and religions. However, Morrison's fiction demonstrates that much of what America proposes to be and to value, such as diversity, non-discrimination, the notion of the American dream, and its availability to everyone regardless of the race, class, and gender they belong, is not always the case. As the professor of English, Danielle Russell, explicitly states: "Belonging is an integral part of identity (2006: 47), and black people often feel homeless and that they do not belong anywhere, as they were cut off from their African heritage and not accepted into their new forced American environment.

Continuing the discussion on the relevance of ethnicity, Audre Lorde makes a connection between ethnicity and systems of power:

> Somewhere, on the edge of consciousness, there is what I call a *mythical* norm, which each one of us within our heart knows "that is not me." In America, this norm is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, Christian, and financially secure. It is with this mythical norm that the trappings of power reside within this society (2016: 16).

Black people in the USA know they are not a part of the mythical norm; they do not belong to the dominant class, as it consists of powerful, rich white men who establish racial stratification in society. Therefore, black people share the common impression of their ethnicity, not only because of their African origin but also because they comprehend their position within the dominant ideology.

Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins add to the discussion on ethnicity: "Sociologists traditionally define ethnicity to refer to groups who share a common culture. Like race, ethnicity develops within the context of systems of power. Thus, the meaning and significance of ethnicity can shift over time and in different social and political contexts" (2016: 66). Even when one takes into consideration the members of the same race, ethnicity and the sense of national belonging change concerning different social class, level of education, income, etc. It can be concluded that notions of ethnicity and national belonging are relative categories that are considered to be personal matters as they might depend on an individual's perception of themselves. By demonstrating a wide selection of black characters, Morrison illustrates that, despite belonging to the same race, they have a very different understanding of ethnicity and are not equally willing to embrace their heritage.

As far as ethnicity is concerned, Carole Boyce Davies, the professor of Africana studies and literature, makes an important observation regarding the importance of the place where black people originate from: "Geography is linked deliberately to culture, language, the ability to hear and a variety of modes of articulation. It is where one speaks from and who is able to understand, to interpret that gives actuality to one's expression" (1994: 20). The country where black people come from is one of the defining aspects of their identity, as the country is directly related to the culture, music, language. Forced migration caused oblivion and the inability to pass cultural heritage on to future generations. Additionally, from a psychological perspective, it must be challenging for black people to call and consider the United States their home after it caused them so much pain. Davis elaborates on the implications of such circumstances: "Both physical and psychic homelessness exists on a continuum which has as its extreme physical disruptions and outsiderness and a variety of nodal points of displacements through exile, migration, movement" (1994: 113). Forced migration caused literal and metaphorical homelessness; black people became financially dependent on white people, first through bondage and later on through job and educational opportunities; simultaneously, black people lost all ties to their native country, which gradually resulted in forgetting about their cultural traits. It can be concluded that forced migration and the institution of slavery resulted in the negation of both cultural and ethical aspects of black people's identity.

Another sociological aspect that should be taken into consideration is the subtle existence of social classes in the USA, where black people traditionally occupy the lowest position. Alice Walker explains the reason for this: "Without money of one's own in a capitalist society, there is no such thing as independence" (1984: 90). Black people were first denied payments for their labor under the laws justifying slavery, but even after slavery was abolished, black people were paid poorly and were given only menial job opportunities, which perpetuated their dependence on white people. According to Renita Weems, the first black woman who earned a doctorate in Old Testament studies, the poor financial conditions and menial job and educational opportunities brought about another limitation for black women: "Morrison pays tribute to those black women who are doing everything in life but what they are supposed to be doing. Creative women - like so many black women are - without outlets for their creativity. "Artists with no art form" is how Sula Peace is described…" (1979: 50). Weems speaks of creative and artistic potential that black women might possess, but that is never discovered and revealed, as black women are expected to perform a plethora of other jobs, such as taking care of the family, raising children, having a job that would financially help the family, etc. Oppression of black people caused many consequences, one of them being the inability to discover and utilize their artistic abilities. Weems mentions Pauline Breedlove, who never fulfilled her potential as a painter, Pilate, who could have been a poet, and Sula's dancing talent; these women never recognized their artistic potentials and consequently were never able to develop them and maybe even practiced them professionally.

When it comes to the analysis of social perspective in Morrison's fiction, she tackles several sociological issues pertaining to patriarchal expectations and traditions, the problem of ethnic origin and national belonging, the adoption of the white gaze and the development of internalized racism, all of which cause conflicts in female characters' journeys toward self-discovery. In her novels, Morrison provides examples of female behavior in male-dominated traditions and offers a startling insight into the female psyche. She provides portrayals of self-sufficient, independent women, such as Sula and Jadine, who challenge the dominant patriarchal structures of society. However, at the same time, Morrison presents the characters of Nel and Margaret, who seemingly accept the marginal positions they are assigned and do their best to fulfill the patriarchal expectations, even though they do not succeed. It can be inferred that Morrison's novels explore the influence of patriarchal subjugation, societal expectations, and familial upbringing on the construction of female identity while simultaneously painting the picture of social tensions in black tradition in different historical periods.

2.5 Black feminist perspective

Black studies demand rigorous attention as they highlight racial disparity and discriminatory practices crucial in the identity construction of female characters in Morrison's novels. In discussing race, Morrison justly observes: "For I have never lived, nor has anyone, in a world in which race did not matter. Such a world, a world free of racial hierarchy, is frequently imagined or described as dreamscape, Edenesque, utopian – so remote are the possibilities of its achievement" (2019: 208). Racial issues powerfully resonate through Morrison's novels, illustrating how racism and discrimination affect women of different ages, levels of education, social classes, and personal characteristics. Whether Morrison is describing a young girl desperately wishing to fit in the standardized concepts of beauty or a notorious independent woman who defies patriarchal expectations, a woman who committed infanticide rather than have her children return to slavery, or an educated, beautiful woman who is confused about her place in the world, Morrison demonstrates that race is an integral part of an identity.

Since racism is often mentioned as the main reason for black people's oppression throughout history, it is essential to understand this concept. Andersen and Collins define the idea of racism in the following manner:

> Racism is a system of power and privilege; it can be manifested in people's attitudes but is rooted in society's structure. Racism is reflected in the different group advantages and disadvantages, based on their location in this societal system. Racism is structured into society, not just in people's minds (2016: 56).

Racism can be described as a system of beliefs and practices that considers a particular race to be superior to others. Racism often results in discriminatory attitudes and practices against people of a certain race. Andersen and Collins suggest that racism is closely connected to social classes, which seems logical as historically, white people had usually been the ones who were more potent and privileged. There are many historical examples of their exploitation of black people and other oppressed groups to achieve economic and financial success, which resulted in the deprivation of higher social status for the oppressed and exploited. Over time the laws further enabled racist tendencies by depriving black people of education, economic opportunities, and financial advancements. This accounted for the creation of institutionalized racism, where laws and government institutions were manipulated into forming a racially unequal society.

Given the long, painful history of slavery, it is clear that racism, manifested in institutions and people's opinions and attitudes, has dramatically impacted black people's identity construction. Collins explains how racial disparity influences an individual: "Racial segregation erases individuality – Blacks are treated as interchangeable members of a derogated group" (1998: 20). When the historical period of slavery is taken into consideration, racist practices annihilated black people's sense of self, as they were held in captivity, deprived of any human rights, forced to work tirelessly at plantations, physically and psychologically abused, and treated as animals. However, even after the abolition of slavery, racist opinions persisted. As noted by Collins, "[…] racial thinking conventionally signified sets of negative associations of both individual characteristics (e.g., sexuality and criminality) and collective attributes (e.g., family structures and pathological cultural values) attributed to assumed biological differences between races" (1998: 81). Racist thinking creates prejudices about black people when it comes to both black individuals and the black community; therefore, black women are often considered to be promiscuous and uneducated, while black men are thought of as criminals and rapists. These negative assumptions about them affect the construction of their individual and collective identity since they have to deal with many negative connotations associated with the color of their skin.

In their discussion on racist tendencies, Andersen and Collins also mention the recently developed phenomenon: "*Color-blind racism* is a new form of racism in which dominant groups assume that race no longer matters – even when society is highly racially segregated and when individual and group well-being is still strongly determined by race" (2016: 57). Color-blind racism is based on the complete denial of the existence of racism and belief that there is no racial inequality. This illusory stand harms the marginalized categories even more since failure to acknowledge racism and all its effects only perpetuates the existing discriminatory practices. It does nothing to mend racial inequalities that evidently exist. Morrison portrays color-blind racism in *Tar Baby*, where black and white characters seemingly coexist harmoniously and get along well. However, as the novel progresses, the concealed racist tendencies resurface, illustrating a racially divided society.

On the subject of racial disparity, it seems relevant to tackle the background information on the linguistic origin of the word used to denote the dominant racial category. Andersen and Collins explain that the term Caucasian originates from Johann Blumenbach who was a German anthropologist who believed that Russian Caucasians were the most beautiful people and thus should occupy the highest position on a racial hierarchy (2016: 58). Therefore, the word used to represent the dominant racial category was chosen for aesthetic reasons, i.e., for the physical appearance of a group of people who were considered more beautiful than others. Andersen and Collins express disbelief that the majority of people are unaware of these pieces of information: "It is amazing when you think about it that this term remains with us, with few questioning its racist origin and connotations" (2016: 58). The fact that the majority of people are uninterested in the origin of racism and how a specific category of people came to be more dominant than others, testifies to the fact that the majority of people are racist and that they support the current trend of racist discrimination. The selection of one race based on physical appearance to be superior to other races is highly racist and displays the selection's arbitrariness and superficiality. On this topic, sociologist Herbert J. Gans provides an explanation for the continuance of racial hierarchies: "This is no accident, and Americans have therefore always used race as a marker or indicator of both class and status. Sometimes they also use it to enforce class position, to keep some people "in their place"" (2016: 95). For American colonizers using race as the signifier of the dominant and inferior categories of people proved to be highly beneficial, as they used it to justify the institution of slavery that ultimately brought them financial and economic success and power and confirmed their status as the superior race in

the USA. Even after the abolition of slavery, racist, discriminatory practices and attitudes persisted, which accounted for the white dominance of society and politics.

Another interesting point that Andersen and Collins emphasize in connection with race is that racial hierarchy is based on "the inequality between and among racial groups" (2016: 56). Apart from the dominant categories established between white and black people, there is also stratification among the members of the black population based on class, level of education, income, the exact shade of their skin, etc. The existence of stratification among the members of the black community could impede their collective sense of identity. Staying united despite the various forms of oppression they have suffered through could help the black community overcome the historical trauma of slavery and build a stronger bond. By discriminating against members of the same community, the black population only becomes more internally divided along social and class lines.

Given the racial disparity and other forms of discrimination that black people have experienced, it is evident that the idea of equality has been an unattainable goal for the black community. However, when it comes to the concept of equality, Paula Giddings asks a valid question: "What should *equality* mean? The right to acculturate into American society? Or the right to express one's own distinct cultural values without being penalized for it?" (1984: 183). As evidenced by both black feminists' works and Morrison's fiction, black people do not seem to acquire equality in either of these two respects. Since black people were forced to move to the United States, they deserve equal treatment from both white people living in the same country and the legal institutions. Additionally, they should be entitled to cherish and celebrate their cultural tradition, which is an integral part of their ancestry and collective identity. However, Morrison's novels suggest that black people are expected to acculturate into the white society so that they would be considered equal; Morrison exemplifies this idea in *Tar Baby*, where Jadine, who completely immersed herself into white culture, is considered superior to other black people and equal to white people. Still, Jadine's total assimilation into white American society also meant that she forgot her ancient properties and completely neglected her traditional values and heritage. The example of Jadine suggests that reaching equality with white people is only possible through total disregard for black tradition.

When analyzing the reasons for the onset and existence of racism, Audre Lorde states that the inability to understand differences causes not only racism but also sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia: "The above forms of human blindness stem from the same root – an inability to recognize the notion of difference as a dynamic human force, one which is enriching rather than threatening to the defined self, when there are shared goals" (1984: 45). Accepting differences among people is essential for many reasons, one of them being the creation of a more cohesive and united community, instead of one fraught with racial and class divisions. According to Lorde, all forms of discrimination are based on certain people's beliefs that they are superior to others and that everything different from what they are and what they believe in is inferior and worse. Such extremist viewpoints and tendencies can potentially be dangerous as they are often used as excuses and justifications for catastrophic events such as wars, terrorist acts, and other forms of oppression of marginalized categories, such as the institution of slavery.

Commenting on the verbal expressions of racism, Dill and Zambrana make an essential point regarding language that reflects racism: "It is exemplified in the simple acts of referring to White men as "men" and men of color with a racial modifier in news reports; or reports by White women of experiencing feelings of threat or fear when encountering a Black man on the street in the evening" (2009: 11). It is evident that "everyday racism" (Dill and Zambrana, 2009: 11) is widespread and that negative connotations are associated with the words denoting black people. As mentioned already, people do not tend to describe Caucasians as "white people" while they usually emphasize that someone is a "black woman" or a "black man"; the

word “white” seems to be implied, while the word “black” seems to be necessary to highlight the deviation from the norm. Using such words that emphasize the differentiations among the races can be very harmful for the black population and the overall concept of discrimination, as the language colored with racial distinctions might become a part of everyday language and thus deepen the racial divisions that already exist among different races.

When analyzing the impact of racism on black people, it is relevant to mention the black female experience and the levels of oppression they suffer in addition to being racially discriminated against. Pertaining to black gender ideology, Barbara Omolade notably remarks that despite sharing the experiences of racial oppression during the period of slavery, gender equality was not established between black men and women: “[…] even after the end of slavery when the white patriarch receded, maleness and femaleness continued to be defined by patriarchal structures, with black men declaring wardship over black women” (1995: 373). Given the common, shared history of slavery, black men were expected to consider black women their equals, as both sexes endured physical and psychological abuse. However, after the abolition of slavery, black men assumed patriarchal superiority over black women, which meant that women now experienced racial and gender oppression.

Another perspective that shall be considered regarding the challenging position of black women is the notion of sexual politics. Patricia Hill Collins explains what this term encompasses: “Sexual politics can be defined as a set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race, and sexuality that frame all men and women’s treatment of one another, as well as how individual men and women are perceived and treated by others” (2004: 6). Sexual politics is interspersed with the concept of female identity, as it includes the intersection of sexuality and gender roles, as well as the formation of sexual identity; when it comes to black women, sexual politics also refers to sexual and reproductive exploitation. The ways how black women have been treated and viewed by both black and white people have lingering consequences on their identity development. Andersen and Collins add to the discussion by saying: “Similarly, beliefs about women’s sexuality structure gender oppression. Thus, sexuality operates as a system of power and inequality comparable to and intersecting with the systems of race, class, and gender” (2016: 71). Black women have historically been labeled as hypersexual and promiscuous. These negative stereotypes were used as justification for black women’s objectification and sexual exploitation, which reiterates the connection between female sexuality and racial dominance. It is noteworthy to emphasize that most of these stereotypes were created in the period of slavery; it seems unfair that black women were described as promiscuous when white men were the ones who raped them, exploited them sexually, and forced them to have as many children as possible. As observed by Kay Lindsey: “Classifications and categorizations of groups of people by other groups have always been for the benefit of the group who is doing the classifying and to the detriment of the classified group” (1970: 104). White people defined and determined the position of black people according to their wishes, which included exploitation and abuse in the period of slavery, all the while ensuring that they had a valid explanation for their brutal treatment of black people, especially women. The most convenient explanation for them would be the creation of false narratives that black women were naturally hypersexual and promiscuous. Frances Beale exemplifies yet another form of abuse of black women: “When the birth control pill was first being perfected, it was tried out on Puerto Rican women and selected Black women (poor), using them as human guinea pigs, to evaluate its effect and its efficiency” (1970: 117). This information shows that black women, together with other marginalized women, were also exploited for medical purposes; their lives and risks to their health were not considered as valuable as those of white women.

It can be concluded that racial and gender oppression created a negative image of black women. Patricia Hill Collins believes that black women should defy these imposed negative

portrayals and that they should be the ones to define themselves: "By insisting on self-definition, Black women question not only what had been said about African-American women but the credibility and the intentions of those possessing the power to define" (2000: 114). While it is true that black women's identity is primarily tied to historical, political, and social circumstances, that does not mean that the power to define who they are and who they wish to be should belong to anyone but themselves. As Collins suggests, black women must separate themselves from the negative image of black women that have long been nurtured in the dominant white culture if they wish to reject the stereotypes and show their true qualities and abilities. Additionally, Kay Lindsey points to another issue that arises if black women allow the dominant tradition to define them: "[…] when we are defined by those other than ourselves, the qualities ascribed to us are not in our interests, but rather reflect the nature of the roles which we are intended to play" (1970: 108). If black women do not take their self-definition into their own hands and if they continue to allow white people to define them, their path toward self-actualization will be fraught with insecurities, racial self-hatred, and internalized racism, as they will always be defined by the inappropriate images imposed on them by the dominant classes. Still, Collins emphasizes that this cannot be done unless black people reject the dominant white ideology:

> For example, adhering to externally derived standards of beauty leads many African-American women to dislike their skin color or hair texture. Similarly, internalizing prevailing gender ideology leads some Black men to abuse Black women. These are cases of the successful infusion of dominant ideologies into the everyday cultural context of African Americans (2000: 286).

While there is nothing that black people can do regarding white people's beliefs and opinions, especially as these have long traditions, that does not mean that they should succumb to them and start accepting them as their own. Adhering to white beauty standards, considering black people ugly, and allowing white people's stereotypes of black people to become authentic accounts of black people's behaviors and attitudes, only make the identity quest more challenging. Additionally, developing internalized racism and racial self-hatred, not to mention witnessing black men's abuse of black women, set a bad example for the younger generations of black people who look up to their parents for guidance and support on their road to self-discovery. In this way, black children will also adopt negative behavior patterns from their parents and learn to accept white ideology as the dominant one.

Furthermore, the identity crises of black women and the negative self-image they develop about themselves are deeply rooted in the ruthless scrutiny of the white gaze. The distinction between the opposite terms "white" and "black" has long existed, providing the basis for racist discrimination. Patricia Hill Collins provides the historical usage of the terms: "Long before the English explored Africa, the terms "black" and "white" had emotional meaning within England. Before colonization, white and black connoted opposites of purity and filthiness, virginity and sin, virtue and baseness, beauty and ugliness, the God and the devil" (2004: 98). These emotional connotations of the antonyms infused the term "white" with the positive meanings, while the word "black" denoted everything negative. Therefore, these opposite meanings of the word provided justifications for the institution of slavery, consequential discrimination, and the prevalent opinion that black people are less beautiful, intelligent, or worthy due to the color of their skin. American writer Paule Marshall quotes her friend's words that depict black people's opinion regarding the distinction between terms black and white: "We live surrounded by white images, and white in this world is synonymous with the good, light, beauty, success, so that, despite ourselves sometimes, we run after that whiteness and deny our darkness, which has been made into the symbol of all that is evil and

inferior" (1970: 27). Black people are surrounded by white culture and the widespread associations with the words "white" and "black" that made black people feel insecure about their racial identity and which often encouraged their wish to be different and deny their cultural heritage. White people's adoption of the white gaze in their perception of black people has strongly influenced how they perceive themselves. It also encouraged many black people to adopt the white gaze in their view of fellow black people, thus increasing their feelings of inferiority and inadequacy.

Morrison's novels offer many examples of adopting the white gaze, illustrating the prevalence of this negative influence on black people's identity formation. Morrison shows the dominance of white culture in the portrayal of many white Hollywood actresses mentioned in *The Bluest Eye*, such as Shirley Temple, Joan Harlow, and Ginger Rogers, whom black women admire, and many of them secretly wish they would look like them. This omnipresence of the white influence, not only imposed by white people but also willingly accepted by black people, negatively impacts the psychological state of mind of a young girl Pecola who is at the susceptible age crucial for one's identity formation. Through the story of Pecola's mother, Morrison shows the consequences of worshipping white people over her own culture and family. Apart from her family, Pecola feels she is perceived through the community's white gaze when the store owner is careful not to touch her hand or when the fair-skinned woman called Geraldine insults her and throws her out of the house; here, Morrison ironically portrays the immigrant and fair-skinned black woman adopting the white gaze in their perception of the black girl when they also belong to the marginalized categories of society. The repeated story of Dick and Jane throughout the novel shows that the educational system in the United States was adjusted for white children only; the story of Dick and Jane mirrors the psychological state of mind of Pecola and her fall into insanity. Morrison offers numerous instances of both white and black people adopting the white gaze: in *Sula*, the conductor's treatment of Nel and her mother in the whites-only train, in *Beloved*, the Schoolteacher's observations, animal metaphors and characteristics he attributes to enslaved Black people; in *Tar Baby*, the tacit assumption of both black and white people that Son is a rapist and criminal; in *The Bluest Eye*, the doctor's treatment of Pauline during childbirth, as well as white people's insistence to witness Cholly's first sexual encounter. A large number of examples that Morrison includes that represent the adoption of the white gaze when perceiving black people shows that black people are constantly presented with this negative view of themselves, often making them feel inferior and inadequate.

Nevertheless, although the display of the white gaze was primarily associated with white people, the adoption of the white gaze when observing black people became very prominent among the members of the black community. As insightfully observed by Renita Weems: "Without creating white characters, Morrison creates white characters. Their influence alone is enough" (1979: 56). Even though white characters are not widely present and do not occupy central positions in Morrison's fiction, their presence is felt, affecting black people's lives. Elements of the dominant white culture and black people's adoption of the white gaze have an extremely detrimental influence on black people's identity formation. They give rise to the development of racial self-hatred and internalized racism.

In his book *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon, a psychiatrist and philosopher, explores the psychological impact of racism and colonialism on black people, criticizing the objectification of black people and holding deep-rooted prejudice against them. Fanon claims that black people living in the white world have to wear a white mask to fit in, the mask which conceals their true identity. However, Fanon also indicates that part of the problem lies in the long history of black people's acceptance of white superiority: "The black man wants to be like the white man. For the black man there is only one destiny. And it is white. Long ago the black man admitted the unarguable superiority of the white man, and all his efforts are aimed at

achieving a white existence" (2008: 178). Many black people develop feelings of racial self-loathing and internalized racism because they strive to become a part of the dominant tradition. Nevertheless, Fanon believes that black people must abandon this line of thought and focus on themselves. He proudly says: "I am not a prisoner of history. I should not seek there for the meaning of my destiny. I should constantly remind myself that the real *leap* consists in introducing invention into existence. In the world through which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself" (2008: 179). Fanon seems to suggest that black people need to let go of the chains of the past, which means that they need to reject the white gaze and how white people have perceived them and focus on their own journey toward self-discovery.

Discussing the pivotal aspects of black individuality, Alice Walker emphasizes the significance of community: "What the black Southern writer inherits as a natural right is a sense of community" (1984: 17). Walker gives an example of a black midwife who would always appear when called to deliver the baby regardless of the payment she may or may not receive. Walker compares this example from black culture to hospitals, where one has to have enough money in order to be treated (1984: 17). Communal support and solidarity have been a fundamental aspect of black people's lives ever since the period of slavery, as black people experienced systemic oppression, racism, economic difficulties, and various forms of physical and psychological abuse, they relied on each other for help and support. This was especially true of slave children, who were often cared for by slave women who were not their mothers. This practice of cooperation and solidarity persisted among black people and became an essential aspect of their collective identity. Morrison gives a prominent role to the community in her fiction, where she demonstrates the importance of supporting each other and the repercussions of the community's betrayal of one of its members.

Another important aspect of black individuality that is important for identity formation and that has been harmed by the long tradition of racial, social, and gender oppression are the relationships between black men and women. During slavery, black men and women were forbidden from getting married and having a family, and sexual and reproductive exploitation of women and forced separation of children from parents psychologically scarred black people as they were powerless to stop these acts of abuse. Kay Lindsey discusses the black people's view on the concept of family: "The family, as a white institution, has been held up to Blacks as a desirable but somehow unattainable goal, at least not in the pure forms that whites have created" (1970: 105). The creation of a family had long been an impossible dream for black people due to the institution of slavery. Still, even after slavery was abolished, black families have been affected by historical traumas, economic and financial disadvantages, low social position in society, the influence of the "white gaze," development of internalized racism and racial self-loathing, and many other factors that made the creation of an ideal family resembling perfect white families as the one described in Dick and Jane primer in *The Bluest Eye*, completely unreachable for black people.

It has already been mentioned that black women occupy the lowest position in society as they are considered to be at the bottom of racial, social, and gender hierarchy. All these forms of oppression consign black women to the margins of society. In this respect, black women are also considered inferior to black men due to gender oppression and patriarchal gender roles that they are expected to fulfill. Owing to bell hooks, we are aware of the many layers of oppression apart from class, gender, and race that are usually discussed, such as forms of oppression based on sexuality, age, disability, physical appearance, mental health, language use, etc. On the subject of gender oppression, bell hooks comments: "[…] sexism is perpetuated by institutional and social structures; by the individuals who dominate, exploit, or oppress; and by the victims themselves who are socialized to behave in ways that make them act in complicity with the status quo" (1984: 43). bell hooks emphasizes that the responsibility for oppression lies in both the oppressors and the oppressed; while women are victimized both by

government institutions that enable the system of oppression and individuals that exert the power that these institutions give them, women have to cooperate in rebelling both the institutions and individuals who support gender discrimination.

Regarding the oppressors themselves, there are many stereotypes that oppressors can only be white men, when Barbara Smith correctly defines the oppressor as "the person(s) who takes away your freedom" (1979: 126). Smith further clarifies: "This means the person may be of the same class as you (your husband, your parents, your neighbors, strangers); the same race as you (your husband, your parents, your neighbors, strangers); and even the same sex as you (a racist or class exploiter)" (1979: 126). Smith implies that the oppressor can be anyone, regardless of race, class, and gender, and that it is even possible that the oppressor and oppressed are in familial or friendly relationships. This is widely illustrated in Morrison's fiction, where white people oppress black people, black people other black people, parents their children, and husbands their wives. While black women try their best to protect their children and their families from various forms of oppression, Renita Weems criticizes men for not doing the same: "A devotion which is not always reciprocated. Not one of the male characters *wraps* his life around his woman, his family, to the doting extent that the women do" (1979: 53). In her fiction, Morrison offers examples of many men who do not express the same amount of love, devotion, and protection when it comes to their families, as women do, such as Cholly, Halle, BoyBoy Peace, and Jude, all of whom abandon their families. Perhaps the reason why black men do not display the same amount of commitment and care that women do is that the experience of slavery as well as the racial, social, and economic oppression of black people that persisted after the abolition of slavery, teach them they should not get too attached to anyone, as they might be murdered, abused, or taken away.

Finally, bell hooks speaks of the importance of including black women in literary tradition: "Reading fictional narratives where black female characters break through silences to speak the truth of their lives, to give testimony, has helped individual black women take the risk to openly share painful experiences" (2015: 35). Reading about black women's road to self-discovery helps readers understand all the challenges that black women face due to racial, gender, and social discrimination. In her novels, Morrison shares black women's stories that serve both as a testimony to the black female experience and as a source of inspiration and empowerment for black women.

2.6 Narratological perspective

The dissertation will explore narrative techniques and discourse and how Morrison narrates stories through identity quests, traumatized experiences, and repressed memory. As noted by a cultural theorist and professor in literary theory, Mieke Bal: "narrative is a cultural attitude" (2017: xx), and Morrison's narratives can be perceived as a cultural commentary on the identity questions of black women.

As Morrison explained in the documentary *Toni Morrison – The Pieces I am*, she is very well aware of the power of language. In the novels selected for the analysis in the dissertation, Morrison incorporates descriptions of female characters that are very different in their personalities and lifestyles. Still, all the female characters have something in common – their identity quest is marked by the complex interrelationship of various political, social, racial, and historical aspects. Morrison does not write her novels in conventional chronological order, but she changes viewpoints, goes back and forth in time, gives voice to the marginalized characters, demands readers' participation and involvement, and reveals different layers of characters' personalities, all of which allow readers to get insight into the construction of female identities from different perspectives, and show that female identity development is a

multifaceted process that, apart from intersectional analysis of race, class, and gender relations, requires a narratological investigation.

In her depiction of compelling but also disturbing and shocking stories, Morrison chooses engaging narrators and presents points of view of the characters that we usually do not expect to hear from. For example, Morrison describes the rape scene through the point of view of a rapist rather than a victim, and she offers a deeply personal and emotional confession of a woman who murdered her own daughter. In this way, Morrison gives the people who were denied their voice and the right to speak an opportunity to tell their story. Additionally, Morrison creates an inviting environment in which readers are welcome to make their own judgments regarding the characters' actions. As noted by Julie Cary Nerad, "Morrison places her characters within contexts that explain, if they do not excuse, each character's complex actions" (2003: 638). Morrison's characters are very different women of different economic backgrounds, belonging to different social classes, and of different ages, opinions, and personalities. In this way, she portrays characters who are flawed and whom readers can relate to, which is why some deserve forgiveness and empathy despite their wrongful and morally questionable actions.

When discussing the narratological perspective, it is imperative to emphasize that language is a powerful tool that can be used for both positive and negative purposes. As Kevin Everod Quashie insightfully observes, language has often been manipulated to serve the colonization of black people: "Language, then, is an initial site of colonization, making and marking difference, sanctioning value to a difference made up" (2004: 132). Although the concept of racial discrimination is a social construct, language has been used as the demarcating parameter that denotes the difference and hierarchies among people. Therefore, the language transforms the abstract concepts of "race," "white gaze," and "discrimination" into precise, emotionally and racially infused terms that threaten the individuation process of the black population.

Nevertheless, as powerful as language might be, it does not always have enough power to express all the features of one's identity. Quashie exemplifies this idea by mentioning the newspaper article that reported Sethe's act of infanticide, emphasizing: "[…] Sethe's determination that none of the words in that newspaper article could possibly capture her very Black and female experience" (2004: 129). As elaborate as the article might have been, Sethe knew that it could not fully explain all the reasons why she committed this brutal act and that readers would not grasp the truthful version of events from it. Another point that should be taken into consideration is that this article was written by white people in the newspaper and intended for a white audience. In the period of racial tensions, the language used by white people cannot be trusted to convey the black female experience.

Morrison also uses different language varieties to denote characters' origin, educational attainment, whether or not they are associated with the values of the black community and even their mental state. Therefore, in *Tar Baby*, the way that Son and Jadine speak reflects that Jadine is an educated woman living in the metropolis and that Son comes from a small town; in *Sula*, Sula, who has traveled and received an education speaks differently from the Bottom inhabitants who have never left the town; Morrison exemplifies that language use mirrors educational attainment, the places where characters live, and their social class. Furthermore, when Morrison depicts the trauma of infanticide in *Beloved*, she uses a different style to denote the characters' relationship with the deceased ones. According to Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin who wrote extensively about language use: "The dead are loved in a different way. They are removed from the sphere of contact, one can and indeed must speak of them in a different style. Language about the dead is stylistically quite distinct from the language about the living" (1981: 20). When speaking about the deceased, the language style is different because it is infused with emotions of grief. Dialogue with the deceased is

impossible, so memory and emotions color the language people use when speaking about those who are dead. While reading *Beloved*, the language spoken by characters indicates experienced traumas, impaired memory, confusion, and sorrow. Morrison further enriches the novel's linguistic representation with Beloved's monologue, which represents the story of the deceased daughter. Beloved speaks in a traumatized language; her monologue is fragmented, without punctuation, and difficult to comprehend, and thus reflects the trauma, pain, and death, not only of the murdered daughter but all the murdered enslaved people who died during colonization.

On the other hand, Morrison incorporates the Dick and Jane story in *The Bluest Eye*, which was widely used to teach children to read and represents a perfect white family that many black families envied as this family was racially and socially superior to black families. This story is repeatedly written in the novel, but its form alters, moving from being coherent to completely incomprehensible, illustrating the gradation of the psychological state of Pecola. Additionally, Morrison portrays characters such as Nel's grandmother in *Sula*, whose spoken Creole, with the omission of verbs and almost exclusive usage of Present Simple Tense, denotes her connection with cultural heritage, which is an essential aspect of one's identity.

When it comes to the exploration of narrative strategies that Morrison uses in her fiction, it is noteworthy to mention the usage of grotesque elements in the portrayal of vivid visual images of dramatic events. Grotesque is a literary device that contributes to the realistic portrayal of characters' lives, especially in dramatic and traumatic events, and also awakens readers' reactions. When investigating the reasons why Morrison includes numerous grotesque images, Susan Corey presents her view: "This aesthetic form is well suited to carry out Morrison's desire that her work create discomfort and unease in order to confront her readers with an unfamiliar reality" (2000: 31). Morrison incorporates grotesque elements wishing to emphasize the hardships that black women had to endure in the face of oppressive historical circumstances. Morrison explicitly recounts physical suffering, offering descriptions of rape, stealing of milk, wearing a bit in the mouth, committing infanticide, describing the scars on Sethe's back from whipping, etc. Grotesque elements also describe physical abnormalities, such as Eva's missing leg, Sula's mysterious face mark that changes its shape and color, Sethe's chokecherry tree on her back, and Beloved's scar. It is also demonstrated in the insanity and irrational behavior of Pecola, Sula, Therese, and Sethe. Grotesque elements are also evident in the portrayal of natural disasters and devastation that follow the relevant events in the novel, such as the example of the marigold seeds that do not grow as Pecola's pregnancy ends tragically or a plague of robins that accompanies Sula's return into Medallion, boding a series of unfortunate events. By incorporating grotesque, monstrous, and often disturbing elements in her fiction, Morrison provokes readers' reactions but simultaneously portrays black women's realistic struggles.

Another important narrative element in Morrison's fiction is the use of ellipsis, which Bal elaborates on: "That which has been omitted – the contents of the ellipsis – need not be unimportant; on the contrary, the event about which nothing is said may have been so painful that it is being elided for precisely that reason…" (2017: 91). Ellipsis, or the omission of parts of the story, unequivocally reveals the hidden traumas, repressed memory, silences, and what is considered to be unspeakable in characters' opinions. Readers never learn what happened to Halle, if Sethe recovered fully from the traumatic experiences, what Jadine plans to do next in her life, where Son goes, whether Pecola overcomes her trauma, how Eva lost her leg and got the money, etc. These parts of the novels filled with gaps and silences belong to the readers, their personal interpretations, and their opinions. Still, commenting on the ellipsis, it is noteworthy to juxtapose the immensity of trauma with the lack of appropriate verbal expression. Analyzing the inability to verbalize traumatic experiences, a professor and author specializing in trauma studies, Laurie Vickroy, clarifies: "The most horrific events must be narrated indirectly, as the characters have an incomplete vocabulary for their suffering" (2002:

179). In Morrison's novels, Pecola never verbalizes the traumatic events of rape and pregnancy, in the same way that Sethe has difficulties explaining the reasons why she murdered her daughter. These traumas pervaded their lives to the extent that they seemed unable to discuss them.

Within the narratological framework, the trauma narrative is one of the most challenging aspects of linguistic representation. Laurie Vickroy defines the term in the following way: "Trauma narratives, I contend, are personalized responses to this century's emerging awareness of the catastrophic effects of wars, poverty, colonization, and domestic abuse on the individual psyche" (2002: x). The repertoire of trauma narratives incorporates various natural or human-caused disasters that cause irreparable damage to individuals. In her novels, Morrison delves into the psychology of female characters deeply affected by multiple traumatic experiences, such as rape, physical and psychological abuse, infanticide, social and economic oppression, racial discrimination, etc. Regarding the purpose of trauma narratives, Vickroy has notably remarked on the desperate need that compels authors to problematize trauma in their works: "Testifying to the past has been an urgent task for many fiction writers as they attempt to preserve personal and collective memories from assimilation, repression, or misrepresentation" (2002: 1). Morrison was aware that traumatic experiences that the black population has suffered through lacked literary attention in the period of her creative output. Therefore, she decided to document them, and thus she preserved the traumatic past of black people both as a testimony and a memorial. Furthermore, Morrison focused national attention on the essential aspect of national history that many white people did not know or did not care to know about, hence emphasizing the black presence in the historical and cultural milieu of the United States.

Regarding the writing process of trauma narratives, Vickroy asserts that expressing traumatic experiences in narratives is a very strenuous job: "They reveal many obstacles to communicating such experience: silence, simultaneous knowledge and denial, dissociation, resistance, and repression, among others" (2002: 3). Morrison utilizes several narrative strategies in her attempt to empower the censored and isolated individuals who were exposed to traumas to tell their stories. She uses traumatized language to show that sometimes even language is inadequate to reflect the scope of human suffering. Traumatized language is evident in Beloved's fragmented monologue, where Morrison uses the stream-of-consciousness technique; in Sethe's deliberate silence about infanticide in an attempt to escape from past events; in Pecola's dialogue with an imaginary friend. When it comes to Pecola, Vickroy warns of additional repercussions when children are exposed to traumatic events: "Children are particularly vulnerable to abuse because it effects the way they develop, as well as their life coping skills and future relationships" (2002: 14). Experiencing trauma at such a young, delicate age might bring about insidious consequences, as evidenced by many Morrison's characters. Pecola develops a mental illness after her father rapes her; Denver loses the sense of hearing when she learns that her mother murdered her sister; and Sula's understanding of the world completely changes when she overhears that her mother does not like her.

Apart from individual traumas that characters go through, Vickroy highlights the existence of collective trauma that the black community endures: "Although trauma damages the individual psyche, collective trauma has further destructive consequences in that it breaks the attachments of social life, degrades the sense of community and support from that community, and dominates the mood and interactions of the group" (2002: 13). Black people share the collective trauma of slavery, racially discriminatory practices, gender and social oppression, physical and psychological abuse, and sexual and reproductive exploitation. Collective trauma influences individuals and their social relationships with others; it affects people who directly experience it, including their descendants. However, apart from the negative consequences of collective trauma, it is significant to emphasize that it also helped

the black population form a close-knit community that helps and supports its members. The cooperation and solidarity of members of the black community helped many of its members deal with the consequences of collective trauma and perhaps even overcome them.

Additionally, various ways in which language represents the problematics of collective identity will also be addressed by analyzing important aspects that black people are often deprived of, such as their mother tongue, cultural heritage, place of origin, and personal sense of belonging to a community. Morrison portrays that different characters have different attitudes when cultural heritage, traditions, and ancestry are taken into consideration; while Sethe is not able to speak her mother tongue as the institution of slavery deprived her of growing up with her parents, Nel's mother purposefully chooses to forget her mother tongue, her mother, and the place where she comes from, and she refuses to teach her daughter about her cultural background. Therefore, not all black people wish to be integrated into the black community.

Moreover, Vickroy comments on the reaction to traumatic events: "The social environment, the severity of the event, and the individual's characteristics and experience all determine how someone will cope with trauma" (2002: 14). Depending on the personality traits, the communal support, and the nature of the traumatic event, individuals respond to trauma differently. Morrison portrays a variety of traumatized characters who react to individual and collective instances of trauma in different ways. These are not always examples of successful resolutions of traumatic experiences, such as suppression of emotions, rejection to discuss past events, and alienation from the community. However, Morrison also gives rays of hope by portraying Sethe and Denver, illustrating that it is possible to overcome trauma and attempt to live happily, free from ghosts of the past.

Vickroy shrewdly observes another critical aspect of traumatic events: those who impose trauma on others also suffer. Vickroy explains the position of the oppressors: "To have such power over other human lives destroys the humanity of the powerful as well, distancing them from other humans and from their own feelings" (2002: 44). Morrison offers a plethora of characters who oppress black people through the characters of the Schoolteacher, Geraldine, the boys from Pecola's school, Mr. Yacobowski, etc. However, through the depiction of these characters, Morrison offers an insight into their lives which leads to the conclusion that the negative feelings they exercise due to racial discrimination and oppression of black people also harm them, as neither of them lives a content life, despite their superior position in society.

In conclusion, narratological perspectives are closely related to literary trauma studies and psychoanalytical perspectives, as narrative techniques mirror female characters' psyches and the traumatic events they have suffered through. Due to the gravity of traumas and their influences on female characters' identity development, characters often find it difficult, and sometimes even impossible, to speak about their painful memories and share their feelings. Consequently, Morrison employs narrative devices such as ellipsis, changing viewpoints, fragmented narratives, and stream-of-consciousness techniques to depict how narratives reflect traumas and their impact on female identity construction.

2.7 Literary trauma studies and psychoanalytical perspectives

The analysis of female characters within the framework of psychoanalysis, placing particular emphasis on trauma studies, is of vital importance for a comprehensive understanding of the female identity construction. In her fiction, Morrison offers brave and uncensored discussions on complex taboo topics such as incest, rape, infanticide, and physical and psychological abuse of women. The psychological consequences of such traumatic experiences are tremendous, and they directly influence the formation of personality and the development of identity. The dissertation will employ the literary psychoanalytical and

narratological perspectives (exploring how the language manifests traumatic experiences, what linguistic representation of trauma reveals/hides when it comes to the mental state of individuals, psychoanalytical analysis of traumatic events, etc.) in order to analyze how the direct or indirect exposure to trauma affects the construction of gender identity, following the trauma manifestations in the characters' typology, characters' behavior, and narration.

First and foremost, in order to delve into psychoanalytical perspectives, it is mandatory to understand what the concept of trauma entails. Neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis Sigmund Freud provides the following definition of trauma: "A condition has long been known and described which occurs after severe mechanical concussions, railway disasters and other accidents involving a risk to life; it has been given the name of 'traumatic neurosis'" (1961: 6). Trauma develops when an individual feels that their life has been threatened; it is a reaction to distressing experiences that might have severe psychological repercussions. Applied to Morrison's female characters in novels, most were exposed to life-threatening situations, even though some were judged to be risky based on the characters' subjective perceptions. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola is raped by her father; in *Sula*, Sula and Nel witness the drowning of a friend; in *Tar Baby*, Jadine is exposed to physical abuse; in *Beloved*, Sethe commits infanticide; these traumatic events distort their identities and cause severe psychological consequences.

Given the context of traumatic experiences, it is significant to differentiate between individual and collective trauma. Collective trauma is manifested in the atrocities of the institution of slavery, racial violence, and discrimination, which are the traumatic experiences that shaped the collective identity of the black population. Regarding the impact of collective trauma, Shawan M. Worsley concludes: "Slavery is a critical ideological, cultural, and economic influence. Although African Americans today did not live as slaves, they nonetheless continue to experience the trauma of slavery" (2010: 4). Therefore, as Worsley observed, collective traumas of slavery, discrimination, and oppression are transgenerational traumas passed down to subsequent generations. Although younger generations do not have firsthand experience of these traumatic events, they hear stories from their parents and grandparents, and they suffer from perpetuating consequences in the form of racially discriminatory practices. This is very prominently illustrated in the novels' descriptions of younger generations of black women. Pecola, Sula, Jadine, and Denver are not enslaved but still suffer the repercussions of slavery and discrimination. For example, Pecola is perceived as ugly, and both black and white people judge her because she does not fit into the accepted standards of what is considered beautiful. The community ostracizes Sula as she defies the patriarchal expectations and socializes with white people, which cannot be tolerated by the people who are still very well aware of historical oppression. On the other hand, Jadine is accused of forgetting her ancient properties while she herself struggles with reconciling her background with her modern lifestyle. Denver is a rare example of a girl who, although presented with collective trauma, learns from it and decides not to allow it to interfere with her chosen life path, which means that collective trauma does not impede her identity development.

When it comes to the understanding of trauma's effect, Judith Herman, a psychiatrist, researcher, and author, provides an in-depth explanation of the traumatic experience:

> Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning (1992: 33).

Herman explains that traumas can be inflicted by nature or people, and in both cases, individuals are stunned by their inability to stop or control the traumatic event. Psychological trauma completely shatters one's personality, causing weakness and losing control of one's life. When applied to Morrison's fiction, black people suffered through atrocities caused and imposed by both black and white people. By perpetuating these atrocities, they caused permanent damage to the collective and individual identity of black people. The most devastating psychological consequences of traumatic experiences are illustrated in *The Bluest Eye* and *Beloved*. Having been a victim of both individual and collective trauma, Pecola falls into insanity, believing that she finally got the blue eyes she wished for. On the other hand, due to the individual and collective trauma that Sethe suffered, she commits infanticide, thus inflicting psychological consequences and furthering the traumatic experience not only for herself but for the members of her family as well.

Regarding the changes that trauma causes when it comes to the development of one's personality and how an individual can recover from them, psychiatrist and author Robert Jay Lifton elaborately comments:

> But in extreme involvements, as in extreme trauma, one's sense of self is radically altered. And there is a traumatized self that is created. Of course, it's not a totally new self, it's what one brought into the trauma as affected significantly and painfully, confusedly, but in a very primal way, by that trauma. And recovery from post-traumatic effects, or from survivor conflicts, cannot really occur until that traumatized self is reintegrated (1995: 137).

Traumatic events invoke the creation of traumatized individuals scarred by traumas they have experienced or witnessed. The traumatized individuals are not entirely different from the people they were before, but the trauma has drastically influenced their personality changes. In Morrison's fiction, trauma becomes a catalyst for personality changes; Pecola alienates herself from everyone and resorts to insanity; Pauline's exposure to white standards of beauty deprives her of a nurturing mothering role; Sula's overhearing of her mother's conversation in which her mother says she does not like her daughter and witnessing the death of her friend change her perception of the world and family; Sethe and Denver isolate themselves from the community; Jadine embarks on a journey toward self-actualization. However, as Lifton emphasizes and as is evident in *Beloved*, healing from trauma and restoration of the self is not possible without tackling, accepting, and coming to terms with traumatic events.

Furthermore, the psychoanalytical theoretical framework also allows us to understand how romantic, familial, and friendly relationships influence the female characters' identity development. On the subject of interpersonal relationships, Herman shares her view of the matter: "Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others" (1992: 51). Herman implies that black people are also traumatized on a social and emotional level. They cannot develop their social and emotional intelligence by being deprived of forming essential human relationships and developing natural feelings toward friends and family. This existential crisis related to social relationships contributed to the total annihilation of the self. Traumatic events alter the understanding of traditional notions of a family, as evidenced by many broken homes, absent fathers and husbands, and struggles with poverty. Thus, they directly impacted the construction of female identities, as female characters in the novel often could not discover what kinds of mothers, sisters, daughters, wives, and friends they could have been.

Finally, all the black characters are exposed to the trauma of racism, whether they experience it through slavery, discrimination, the white gaze, the gaze of the community, or

uneasiness about their racial identity. As Morrison competently observed: “The trauma of racism is, for the racist and the victim, the severe fragmentation of the self, and has always seemed to me a cause (not a symptom) of psychosis – strangely of no interest to psychiatry” (2019: 185). Morrison sheds light on the fact that the identity development of both the oppressor and the oppressed is affected by the trauma of racism, as both place particular emphasis on a social construct and allow it to determine one’s superior or inferior position on a racial hierarchy. Morrison also criticizes psychiatry for not including racial issues in its studies of mental illnesses, as she believes that racial problems might cause them.

In addition to being directly exposed to trauma and having firsthand experience of traumatic events, Robert Jay Lifton also addresses the difficult position of being a witness to a traumatic experience such as death: “[…] survival suggests that there has been death, and the survivor therefore has had a death encounter, and the death encounter is central to his or her psychological experience” (1995: 128). Witnessing a harrowing experience of death impedes identity development as witnesses are aware that they are the ones who survived. Therefore, they are the ones who have to live through and remember the traumatic event. Very often, they feel guilt over the fact that they are the ones who did survive. In Morrison’s fiction, Sethe, Sula, Nel, and Eva all witnessed the deaths of important people in their lives; in some cases, they were the ones who murdered them, and they exemplify serious fragmentations of the self as they had to carry the burden of being the survivors until the rest of their lives.

When it comes to consequences of traumatic experiences, professor of literary theory and English literature Irene Visser suggests that some of these repercussions might be beneficial: “It is not only to be understood as acute and event-based, but can also be chronic and non-event based; it can be debilitating and disruptive to individuals and communities, but it can also create a stronger social cohesion and a renewed sense of identity” (Visser as cited in Balaev, 2014: 109). For black people, trauma represents a reflection of historical and social conditions. Most black people have been exposed to trauma, whether it was a direct or indirect experience, personally experienced, or passed down for generations in the form of transgenerational trauma. However, individual and collective trauma that the black population has had to go through also brought them closer together and created a unique, close-knit community that could lead to a possible resolution of the traumatic past. A joint communal effort can overcome even the most unimaginable and unspeakable traumas, as demonstrated in *Beloved*.

By writing extensively about trauma and its connection to the construction of female identity, Morrison offers the narrative representation of something that was considered for a long time to be unspeakable. Judith Herman defines the term “unspeakable” concerning traumatic experiences: “The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness. Certain violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud: this is the meaning of the word *unspeakable*” (1992: 1). In cases of severe traumatic experiences, individuals often feel these are too distressing to be discussed, which is why they suppress memories of such events. For the black population in the United States, unspeakable events are related to the institution of slavery and its many disastrous consequences. Still, Morrison realizes the importance of speaking about the unspeakable and all the traumatic events that befell the black population, as coming to terms with the past seems to be the only way to move forward with life, as Morrison illustrates in her fiction.

Additionally, in the discussion of critical influences on female identity development, it is necessary to mention the concepts of motherhood and mother/daughter relationships as these represent the key aspects of female characters’ personalities in Morrison’s fiction. Speaking of the ordeals connected to childbirth and motherhood, feminist essayist and poet Adrienne Rich comments: “Motherhood is earned, first through an intense physical and psychic rite of passage – pregnancy and childbirth – then through learning to nurture, which does not come by instinct”

(1986: 12). Rich addresses the complicated task of women when it comes to bringing children into the world, both concerning their bodies and their psyches. Rich compares male to female experience when it comes to children, giving an example of rape when men simply father the child and the woman is the one dealing with the consequences: the physical state of pregnancy and the mental issues that follow the event that she did not want to happen. Rich insists that the patriarchal society created this climate, making the distinction between: "the *potential relationship* of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential – and all women – shall remain under male control" (1986: 13). While women are the ones who have reproductive abilities, the patriarchal culture enables men to be the decision-makers when it comes to having children as they are the ones who occupy a higher position on gender hierarchy.

Furthermore, Rich believes that patriarchal beliefs influence not only women's reproductive decisions but also the relationship between mothers and children: "The power-relations between mother and child are often simply a reflection of power-relations in patriarchal society" (1986: 38). Mothers who are oppressed, limited, powerless, very often exercise their authority on their children, as they find no other way to rebel against the patriarchal traditions. Additionally, children brought up in patriarchal families learn that the relationship between husband and wife is based on a gender hierarchy that determines the gender roles according to which the husband is the one who is in control of the household, while a wife has a submissive position of a mother and housewife. Consequently, children learn that these patriarchal relationships represent the norm, and they might continue to follow patriarchal rules and gender roles on their pathway to adulthood.

In Morrison's novels, she illustrates examples of female characters who attempt to defy the patriarchal influence exerted on them; Margaret transfers her feelings of dissatisfaction and unhappiness from her husband to her son by abusing him; Pauline succumbs to feelings of internalized racism and established beauty standards by showing her motherly and nurturing side to white children, while she neglects her own; Sethe murders her daughter as a response to the institution of slavery that denied children to black mothers; Ella defies the pregnancies she was forced into by murdering all the children that were conceived by rape, etc. All these instances mirror the political and social situations that compelled women to commit horrible acts against their children.

Discussing the difficulties that black mothers experienced in the period of slavery, professor Marianne Hirsch explains the historical and political implications of motherhood:

> The economy of slavery circumscribes not only the process of individuation and subject-formation, but also heightens and intensifies the experience of motherhood – of connection and separation. It raises questions about what it means to have a self, and to give that self away. It raises questions about what *family* means. If mothers cannot "own" their children or themselves, they experience separation and loss all the more intensely (1993: 271).

Notions of motherhood in oppressive historical circumstances differ from those in white dominant cultures and traditions due to diverse environments. The institution of slavery incorporated laws that stated that children born in slavery belonged to slaveowners, which meant that they could be sold, exploited, or murdered, and their mothers could do nothing to protect them. The institution of slavery denied black mothers the right to be mothers, and in this way, it annihilated both black motherhood and black families. In *Beloved*, Morrison shows that Sethe's relationship with both her mother and her children was sabotaged by slavery. Sethe fulfills her maternal role in the only way that is familiar to her, so she murders her daughter in order to protect her. Similar behavior is observed in *Sula*, where Eva, unable to help her son,

who struggled to deal with the consequences of war trauma, decides to murder him rather than see him use narcotics. Sethe and Eva have the best intentions when deciding to murder their children. Morrison illustrates that black motherhood focuses on protecting children from slavery, racism, and discrimination and preparing them to face and resist racist ideology. It is based on preservative love, whose primary goal is to keep children alive and safe, and if mothers decide they cannot do so, they consider it right to take their lives.

However, apart from loving and overprotective mother/daughter relationships, there are many unhealthy and traumatized mother-daughter relationships, such as the one between Pecola and Pauline and Nel and her mother, where mothers negatively influence the construction of their daughters' identity in the most vulnerable period, in childhood. The mother/daughter relationship is central to female identity development, and Morrison demonstrates the pernicious effects of such relationships. Regarding the difficult job of black mothers, Kevin Everod Quashie asserts: "…if being a good mother is to secure the best for one's child, the Black mother cannot be a good mother and can hardly be a mother at all" (2004: 66). Providing the ideal circumstances for children's upbringing is a challenging task when faced with discrimination, oppression, and poverty. However, children lack the situational awareness of their circumstances, so Claudia and Frieda in *The Bluest Eye* and Hannah in *Sula* often misinterpret the preservative love that their mothers display in the relationship with their children and understand their protective attitudes as a lack of care and attention when the opposite is true.

Rich makes an important remark regarding the connection between the construction of children's identity and motherhood: "It would seem therefore that from very ancient times the identity, the very personality, of the man depends on power, and on power in a certain, specific sense: that of *power over others*, beginning with a woman and her children" (1986: 64). Children are taught from birth that someone, especially their parents, controls them and that they are dependent on them. In this way, controlling others, and exercising power over others, seem to be an integral part of human identity. However, everyone can't have power, as Rich highlights: "The language of patriarchal power insists on a dichotomy: for one person to have power, others – or another – must be powerless" (1986: 67). Rich suggests that people have historically been divided into those who possess the power and those who have no control at all, and since this division is already introduced to children, it is entirely reasonable that it became a natural part of patriarchal institutions. Therefore, this binary opposition between those in control and those controlled was also the basis of slavery, discrimination, and oppression imposed upon black people, making their path toward self-actualization fraught with difficulties.

When it comes to the preservative forms of love discussed earlier in the chapter, Vickroy explains the extremes that mothers in Morrison's fiction might resort to in the name of love: "As each of these mothers is willing to give, so she asserts the right to take with an intensity that can be murderous and that appears extreme and even "monstrous" to some of the more moderate characters in these novels" (2002: 56). The unfavorable life circumstances such as oppression and discrimination sometimes force mothers to commit unforgivable and unspeakable acts in order to protect their children. While the community often judges this, women believe that they were entitled to these acts as their children belonged to them and they knew what was best for them. As previously mentioned, in *Beloved*, Sethe murders her daughter rather than have her returned to slavery; in *Sula*, Eva murders her son when she sees narcotics have altered his state of mind. These women are absolutely certain of their decisions and are not concerned with the opinions of others as they consider these acts to be personal choices.

The importance of the mother figure is assiduously examined in Morrison's fiction, with a particular emphasis on the process of growing up without a mother, whether in a literal

or metaphorical sense. Rich keenly observes the impact of the absence of a mother in one's life: "The woman who has felt "unmothered" may seek mothers all her life – may even seek them in men" (1986: 242). The presence of a mother and her nurturing and caring approach to her children prove crucial for identity formation, especially in childhood, the most vulnerable phase of growing up. Morrison exemplifies this by offering the portrayal of girls whose identity was severely affected by absent mothers. In *Tar Baby*, Jadine, an orphan, does not learn the importance of family as she had never had a role model while growing up; in *Beloved*, Sethe is troubled by the thought that her mother attempted to escape from slavery without taking her child with her, and this realization bothers Sethe to that extent that she decides to protect her children from slavery at all costs; in *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola's mother is present physically in her life, but she does not express love and care toward her daughter which contributes to her daughter's inferiority complex and racial self-loathing. On the subject of traumatic implications of mother/daughter relationships, Vickroy comments: "The traumatization of mothers and missing recognition diminishes intersubjective nurturance and can create destructive generational legacies" (2002: 25). The irretrievably fractured mother/daughter relationships represent traumatic experiences for both the mother and the daughter, as mothers are unable to perform their natural nurturing role and daughters do not obtain a healthy basis for identity construction that is crucial at a young age. Additionally, as children are provided with inadequate role models, they might make mistakes when they raise their own children; this is illustrated in Morrison's fiction in the example of Sethe's character, who tried to overcompensate to her children because she missed having a mother while she was growing up.

Regarding the importance of parents as role models, C.G. Jung remarks: "Children are educated by what the grown-up *is* and not by what he *says*" (1969: 175). Parents are the primary role models for children; children look up to them and acquire their modes of behavior. Regardless of what the adults are speaking, their behavior and habits are most influential when it comes to children's identity formation. However, that does not necessarily mean the children will imitate their parents and become just like them. Morrison offers examples of Denver and Sula, who recognize the modes of behavior and lifestyles they do not wish to follow in their mothers, so they choose a completely different path. Denver breaks free from the traumatized past and works towards improving her future, while Sula decides to live a life devoid of patriarchal expectations and societal constraints.

Other significant concepts that Morrison introduces to readers and that are crucial for the identity development of black females are the concepts of othermothering and community mothering. Professor and writer on women's issues Andrea O'Reilly elaborates on the meaning of the terms:

> The practice of othermothering, as it developed from West African traditions, became in African American culture a strategy of survival in that it ensured that all children, regardless of whether the biological mother was present or available, would receive the mothering that delivers psychological and physical wellbeing and makes empowerment possible (2004: 6).

The concepts of othermothering and community mothering are extraordinary phenomena and invaluable help to black mothers. These practices mean that the members of the black community will take care of children whose mothers cannot do so, whether it is because of slavery, some other forms of oppression, or poverty. These practices testify to the solidarity and support of black communities. Morrison offers many examples of othermothers and community mothers in her fiction; when Cholly burnt down the house, Pecola stayed with friends; when Eva left her children with neighbors for eighteen months, they were well taken

care of, and Eva was never criticized for it; when Denver needed food and a job, the community assisted her. Nonetheless, Morrison also portrays the rare occasions when women betrayed their tradition, such as the example of women in *The Bluest Eye* that did not take over the role of othermothers and community mothers and did not help Pecola, which negatively influenced the shaping of her identity.

Speaking of the connection between communities and traumatizing experiences, Vickroy expresses her view: “Trauma narratives question concepts of radical individualism through identification and subject-fragmenting conflicts in mother/daughter relationships and in the important role of extended family or community for the possibility of healing” (2002: 26). As it has already been mentioned, traumas such as political, social, and economic oppression caused multiple consequences for black people, one of the most prominent ones being the fractured mother/daughter relationships. While the destruction of the mother/daughter relationship can never be compensated for, the community can play a vital part in aiding children’s identity formation. By portraying the characters of Denver and Pecola, Morrison shows the beneficial and detrimental ways the community might act when the mothers cannot care for their children. Morrison illustrates that the betrayal of black mothers has severe repercussions, reiterating the importance of cooperation.

The interdisciplinary strategy of the detailed analysis of the theoretical perspectives outlined in this chapter will render a thorough interpretation and understanding of the identity formation of female characters. The discussion of the conflicts of identity formation requires an interplay of perspectives and various factors that account for the emergence of these conflicts, which will be analyzed in great detail in the following chapters using the examples of Morrison’s novels.

3 *The Bluest Eye*

3.1 General introduction to *The Bluest Eye*

The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison's first published novel that saw the light of day in 1970, is a very controversial piece of work, discussing the sensitive and disturbing topics of incest, racism, physical and mental abuse, child molestation, domestic violence, and racial self-loathing. It shows the irreparable consequences that racial stereotypes and prejudices may have when they impact the psychological development of female characters, especially of a young girl. Morrison published this novel during social and racial turmoil in the United States, when black people were fighting and standing up for their rights, and when women started addressing the problematic issues of rape and incest, both of which were widely present in the black community.

The Bluest Eye is organized into four sections, each representing a different season and overall depicting events over one year. The novel is set in Lorrain, Ohio, in 1941. It portrays the MacTeer family, who, despite limited financial means, raises their two daughters, Claudia and Frieda, with care and attention. The family takes in Pecola, a girl from a troubled family, because her father, Cholly, attempted to burn down the house. After Pecola moves back home, her family life is shown as very difficult; her father, Cholly, is an aggressive alcoholic, while her mother, Pauline, does not take care of her children and household and even participates in verbal and physical fights with her husband. Pecola's brother Sammy often runs away from home, trying to escape the dramatic upbringing. Pecola develops an inferiority complex due to the scrutiny of the white gaze she is constantly exposed to; the children at school bully her and make fun of her, Mr. Yacobowski does not even want to look at her and tries to avoid touching her hand when he sells her candy; her classmate Maureen who is light-skinned and therefore superior to black Pecola makes fun of her and calls her ugly. Because Pecola is black and poor, people in the community make assumptions about her. She is wrongly accused of killing a cat when the boy Junior invites her to play together but actually tricks her into accepting the blame for the murder of the cat that he committed. His mother, Geraldine, herself in denial about her racial identity, offends Pecola because of her physical appearance and throws her out of the house. Therefore, Pecola starts believing that she is ugly and wishes for blue eyes, as she believes that the blue eyes would bring her beauty and, thus, acceptance and love.

The novel also elaborates on the difficult lives of Pecola's parents. Her mother, Pauline, has felt lonely since she moved to Lorrain, and she found comfort in watching movies, but these movies with beautiful white actors only convinced her of her ugliness. Pauline enjoys spending time at work, cleaning a white people's house, and taking care of their white daughter while she neglects her own house and her children. When it comes to Pauline's husband, Cholly, his parents abandoned him, and he grew up with his aunt. Cholly's first sexual encounter was a humiliating and embarrassing experience for him as the white people observed him. After this painful moment, Cholly went to find his father, who rejected him, and he married Pauline. Cholly makes many poor parental decisions; he is violent, abusive, and an alcoholic, but the worst thing he does is raping his daughter, who consequently stays pregnant. In her moments of desperation, Pecola turns to Soaphead Church, a manipulative charlatan obsessed with whiteness and believed to have the ability to grant wishes. Pecola asks him for blue eyes, thinking this could solve all her problems. Seeing the helpless girl, Soaphead Church takes advantage of her and uses her to kill a dog he hates. Pecola faces harsh criticism from the black community, expulsion from school, and losing the baby; simultaneously, she starts believing that she has been given the blue eyes she wished for and gradually slips into insanity.

The inspiration for the novel comes from Morrison's personal life and her conversation with a childhood friend who told her she no longer believed in God because her prayers to have blue eyes had never been answered. Morrison explained:

> I began to write about a girl who wanted blue eyes and the horror of having that wish fulfilled; and also 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 (1994: 95).

In the novel's foreword, Morrison indicates that the search for identity is universal. Still, she emphasizes the adverse circumstances stemming from racial and discriminatory practices surrounding a young female black child.

The book's title is an important symbol and draws attention to its peculiar form: the superlative form of an adjective denoting color and the singular form of the noun usually used in plural form make an unusual combination. Ágnes Surányi clarifies: "The singular noun may refer to the damaging white gaze; the omitted plural to the object of desire, an epitome of beauty according to mainstream society; or alternatively, to the saddest story of the demise of a child's identity (the "eye" as "I"), integral to the blues sung by Claudia's mother" (2007: 11). In this way Morrison addresses the central theme of the novel – the white gaze and its disastrous consequences when the identity formation of a young black girl is considered. The title serves as a metaphor for the most significant factor stimulating the negative construction of identity at the most vulnerable phase of growing up.

Morrison's choice of the first sentence was widely discussed as the novel begins with an interesting phrase that is particularly relevant for the black community. "Quiet as it's kept" denotes that an important secret is about to be revealed. Morrison connects it to the novel's overall purpose: "In some sense it was precisely what the act of writing the book was: the public exposure of a private confidence" (2019: 190). The phrase "Quiet as it's kept" describes the story of Pecola but also the story of the black experience. Morrison reveals the well-kept secret in the black community: that both white and black people are responsible for women's identity crises. By employing these words at the beginning of the novel, Morrison entices readers' attention, as Lynn Orilla Scott explains: "The secret, signified by the opening phrase, "quiet as it's kept," becomes not the story of incest, which is, after all, known to the community and put to predictable use, but the story of racial self-loathing, a story more problematic and difficult to tell" (2006: 88). Morrison tells this compelling and horrific story through the pathos of victimization of Pecola.

The purpose of Morrison's writing has always been twofold, as it has both artistic and social value. Her novels can be read as beautifully written pieces of work that will occupy time and engage the mind. Still, they also hope to provoke action, as Morrison primarily wishes to draw attention to the issues hindering the construction and development of female identity. Morrison comments: "I don't want to give my readers something to swallow. I want to give them something to feel and think about, and I hope that I set it up in such a way that it is a legitimate thing, and a valuable thing" (1993: 404). Writing about the girl desperately wishing to possess blue eyes with the erroneous idea that they would bring her happiness, Morrison sheds light on the overwhelming importance of racist and discriminatory issues in American society.

3.2 Conflicts of female identity from diversified perspectives

The Bluest Eye offers a varied spectrum of factors and perspectives crucial for understanding the construction and development of female identity. Du Bois explains the difficulties that make the journey of black people toward acquiring a healthy identity challenging: “To-day the ferment of his striving toward self-realization is to the strife of the white world like a wheel within a wheel: beyond the Veil are smaller but like problems of ideals, of leaders and the led, of serfdom, of poverty, of order and subordination, and, through all, the Veil of Race” (2007:57). Exploration of identity formation can be observed through multiple perspectives: historical, social, psychoanalytical (with the emphasis on the trauma studies), through the perspectives of narratology and black feminist criticism. All of these perspectives are interwoven in the novel, and their analyses serve to illustrate the ordeal that female characters have to endure in their struggle to overcome identity crises. Special attention is attributed to the influence of these factors on a young girl. Morrison elaborates on the importance of understanding the identity conflicts that occur among young children:

> The death of self-esteem can occur quickly, easily in children, before their ego has “legs,” so to speak. Couple the vulnerability of youth with indifferent parents, dismissive adults, and a world, which, in its language, laws, and images, re-enforces despair, and the journey to destruction is sealed (Morrison 2007: x).

Children’s identity formation is primarily strenuous due to their young age, fraught with insecurities and lack of life experience. When coupled with hostile surroundings in the form of dysfunctional families, unsupportive communities, and discriminatory environments, children’s identities might be threatened, and this might lead to irreparable consequences. Morrison juxtaposes the identity development experiences of two girls, Pecola and Claudia, to show that certain factors may contribute to different resolutions of identity conflicts. Jill Matus mentions the same factors that affect the individuation process of both girls: “Through the stories of Pecola and Claudia, Morrison examines how identity is constructed in young women, scrutinising in the process aspects of commodity and popular culture, pedagogical strategies and the knowledges they produce, and class and labour relations” (1998: 38). Morrison carefully distinguishes parental methods and community’s attitudes toward girls that are seemingly very similar as they both belong to the same racial, social, and gender categories but that embark on contrasting paths towards identity development.

Furthermore, Morrison asserts the dangers to identity formation that are unique to the black population. Carmen Gillespie pointedly remarks: “The novel addresses the social forces that drive understanding and definition of cultural constructs such as beauty, normalcy, family, and sexuality. These constructs are a particular issue for African-American communities that often are excluded from representation” (2008: 46). The social constructs of beauty and family are particularly sensitive terms when it comes to the black experience, as black people were often convinced by the dominant culture that these concepts belong to white people exclusively. However, their convictions stem both from white culture’s imposition of their dominance and black people’s acceptance of inferior positions. Moreover, Morrison not only describes young girls' identity development, but she also portrays the adults facing similar identity issues and passing them down to their children, together with the community that contributes to deepening these issues instead of helping overcome them. Lisa Cade Wieland adequately explains: “Morrison’s first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, investigates the ways that family values, gender, and community shape both individual and cultural identity” (“Family,” 2003: 115). By adopting

the “white gaze” and displaying internalized racism when observing Pecola, the black community also drastically affects its own identity, shaping it in accordance with discriminatory practices.

3.2.1 Historical and political perspectives

The Bluest Eye is set in 1941, which marks World War II’s beginning for the United States of America. It appears that Morrison’s choice of this year was deliberate. Ágnes Surányi shrewdly observed that the plot setting takes place “…in the year the United States was posing as the champion of democracy abroad, while ignoring its own long-standing history of obsession with racial purity and preference for blue-eyed and blonde-haired Aryans” (2007: 12). On the international political scene, the United States became fully engaged in the World War II wishing to assist in resolving the world conflicts, while it neglected the internal conflicts happening on its soil, thus creating the false image of democratic heaven welcoming people of all the different races, religions and nationalities. By using the term “Aryans,” Surányi invokes the Nazi ideology, comparing the United States’ insistence on the superiority of white people to the Nazis’ war foundation and justification. In this manner, Morrison’s work stands as a sarcastic social commentary on the political situation.

Additionally, Trudier Harris points to another momentous historical event – the “Black is Beautiful” cultural movement that black people started in the 1960s: “Morrison said that she felt it necessary, amidst all the “Black is Beautiful” rhetoric of the 1960s, to develop a story in which all the problems confronting black people were not solved” (1991: 17). While the “Black is Beautiful” movement was an important milestone for the black people, as it encouraged the acceptance and embracing of black culture and identity, Harris explains that Morrison’s novel serves “…to recognize that black is not beautiful to at least one little girl whose mind dissolves under the sordid reality of her existence” (1991: 17). Morrison shows that the movement, while undeniably important, did not mean much to young black girls who were growing up in a hostile familial and communal environment.

From a historical perspective, *The Bluest Eye* might be perceived as a metaphor for the United States’ struggle to develop its identity. Timothy B. Powell noted: “*The Bluest Eye* is meant to be a novel of failure; it is a portrait which depicts how a young black woman’s idea of what constitutes a true self is de-centered by the implicitly ethnocentric tenets of the society into which she is born” (1997: 50). When the novel is compared to the United States of America, it can be observed that the country’s attempts to create a racially and discriminatory-free democratic society in the 1960s were failures, as the society itself was based on the pillars of the dominant culture that constituted the bases for discrimination.

3.2.2 Social perspective

The novel draws attention to the complex notions of social stratification and hierarchies among white and black people based on social class differences. Patricia Hill Collins describes the importance of “class-specific representations of Black masculinity and Black femininity” (2004: 177):

> Within the universe of these representations, authentic and respectable Black people become constructed as class opposites, and their different cultures help

> explain why poor and working-class Black people are at the bottom of the economic hierarchy and middle-class Black people are not (2004: 177).

Apart from the differences between black and white people along racial lines, there is a vast difference in the treatment and behavior toward black people depending on their financial and social status. Social discrimination is highlighted in the novel, and the stratification between different levels of income and social statuses of black people is very prominent. Even the choice of words when describing black people is very deliberate; Geraldine explains the differentiation between Niggers and Colored people in the following manner: "Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud" (Morrison 2007: 87). Therefore, poor black people are discriminated against by both white people and rich black people. Morrison offers many instances of social contrasts by juxtaposing the luxurious house and neighborhood where Pauline works and the Breedloves' household; Maureen Peal's fashionable clothes and Pecola's old and dirty ones; Geraldine's loud insults at Pecola and the little girl's silence and tears.

Danielle Russell uses a powerful metaphor to explain the exploitation of women on social grounds:

> *The Bluest Eye* provides a particularly powerful indictment of the assumption that both woman and land are available for appropriation and exploitation. The "rape of the land" metaphor so often used to describe the cultivation of the wilderness is concretized in Pecola Breedlove – she is literally the violated virgin land (2006: 81).

Pecola's tragedy lies in the total annihilation of her identity caused by a myriad of factors. However, what distinguishes Pecola from other female characters, such as Maureen Peal and Geraldine, who are also black, is her low social rank and the poor financial status of her family that make her an easy target when it comes to communal ostracism, physical and psychological abuse, and susceptibility to the values and beliefs of the dominant white culture. Moreover, Morrison shows that both Pecola's and Claudia's families deal with great poverty, but the novel implies that family support and love may help overcome the identity crises of children despite the adverse social environments.

3.2.3 Black feminist criticism

The identity construction of female characters is tightly connected to the color of their skin, as the racial disparity is embedded in their lifestyles, world views, and perception of themselves. John Ernest emphasizes the omnipresence of racial problematics:

> …race is, in fact, *everywhere*: in the way we live, the way wealth and access to power are passed on from one generation to the next, the way that schools are funded, and the ways in which education is defined, inscribed in textbooks and standardized tests, administered, and presented to students (2005: 42).

In the discussion of *The Bluest Eye*, racial presence is evident in all aspects of the characters' lives. It determines female characters' education, as teachers' pets are students such as Maureen Peal, with a lighter shade of black skin and higher social status; it regulates communal attitudes

that look down on poor black families and considers them inferior to that extent that Mr. Yacobowski does not want to touch Pecola's hand when giving her change; it is ingrained in parenting methods when parents teach their children about bases of discrimination and encourage peer violence, as evidenced by classmates' treatment of Pecola; it is even prominent in doctors' treatment of patients, as Pauline overheard the doctor saying that black women do not feel pain while giving birth because they are like horses. Although Pecola lives and grows up in a predominantly black environment, surrounded by people with the same skin color, internalized racism imposed by the community, together with her low social status, account for creating an inferiority complex and developing racial self-loathing. As Laurie Vickroy observes: "In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison critiques both white cultural dominance and black complicity" (2002: 41). White people appear peripheral in the novel, as there is no extensive presence of white people, and yet their presence is felt constantly as the impact of their ideology seems profound. However, Morrison wishes to suggest that the existence of the white world and its values and beliefs should not be solely held accountable for black people's identity conflicts. On the other hand, when these are coupled with black people's adoption and acceptance of white people's beliefs, they might have severe repercussions and lead to identity annihilation.

Du Bois makes a meaningful connection between being treated a certain way and accepting that treatment as a part of an individual's personality:

> And when, by proscription and prejudice, these same Negroes are classed with and treated like the lowest of their people, simply *because* they are Negroes, such a policy not only discourages thrift and intelligence among black men, but puts a direct premium on the very things you complain of, - inefficiency and crime (2007: 126).

Du Bois justifies black people's resorting to violence and crimes which result from the assumptions and convictions of white people based on social and racial hierarchies in society. Such degrading treatment influences black people's psyche and might encourage them to project the stereotyped images of themselves. Morrison exemplifies this in the characters of Cholly, who lives up to the popular cliché of a black man raping his daughter, and Pauline, who represents the cliché of a black woman as a neglectful mother.

Furthermore, Du Bois opens new spaces for critical inquiry by placing part of the blame on the privileged ones who turn a blind eye to racist issues:

> …so many civilized persons are willing to live in comfort even if the price of this is poverty, ignorance and disease of the majority of their fellowmen; that to maintain this privilege men have waged war until today war tends to become universal and continuous, and the excuse for this war continues largely to be color and race (2007: 208).

While the privileged people are definitely white people who were naturally given supremacy over other races, I shall argue that some members of the black population might also be considered privileged. Morrison portrays the characters of Geraldine and Maureen Peal, who, even though black, are considered superior and perhaps even equal to white people on the social hierarchy due to their economic status. Still, instead of remaining loyal to their origin and respecting people with the same skin color, they identify themselves with white ideals and reject everything related to black values, thus adopting internalized racism.

Given the context of white superiority and black people's internalized racism, Herman Beavers makes a relevant point: "It is important, then, to understand how white supremacy and racial identity work symbiotically, like parasite and host. Morrison emphasizes this parasitic relation through Claudia's condemnation of Lorain's black community for its role in Pecola's destruction" (2018: 75). The keynote of the novel seems to be the realization that the social constructs of race and white superiority are not the only ones responsible for identity conflicts of female characters. The mutual collaboration of white discriminatory practices with black people's voluntary adoption of these practices causes identity annihilation. This is evident in the portrayal of two girls – Pecola and Claudia, who are both black and exposed to racist discrimination but respond to them differently. Unlike Pecola, who allows race to define her identity, Claudia questions racial superiority, and she is aided by her parents' support which increases her self-confidence.

With regard to the consequences of racism, Doreatha Drummond Mbalia elucidates Morrison's main goal for writing this novel: "The thesis of the novel is that racism devastates the self-image of the African female in general and the African female child in particular" (1991: 32). Racism and its many constituent elements such as inferiority complex, racial self-loathing, insecurity, and preference for white ideals, have considerable repercussions on the female psyche and female identity development. In her endeavor to comprehend all the repercussions of racism, Morrison asked herself the following questions while writing *The Bluest Eye*: "How does a child learn self-loathing? Where does it come from? Who enables it? How is it infectious and what might be the consequences?" (*Toni Morrison – The Pieces I am* 14:24-14:37). Searching for her answers, Morrison presents an overview of intersected factors, illustrating that race, while one of the crucial factors, demands the joint effort of other vital aspects when shaping female identity.

On the subject of the difficulties surrounding the black girls' lives, Patricia Hill Collins reveals her innermost feelings at the realization that she was a black woman:

> My world grew larger, but I felt I was growing smaller. I tried to disappear into myself in order to deflect the painful, daily assaults designed to teach me that being an African-American, working-class woman made me lesser than those who were not. And as I felt smaller, I became quieter and eventually was virtually silenced (2000: vi).

The feelings that Collins described, her wishing to disappear, to be quiet and not speak of her emotions, completely coincide with Pecola's feelings and her fervent desire to vanish and be invisible to others. This appears to be a widely spread problem among black girls: facing all the obstacles surrounding their lives that are based on racial and gender discrimination which might encourage their feelings of isolation and complete alienation. Collins further mentions the power of the speech motivated by hatred and its influence on people's opinions of themselves: "The response of the targets shows the power of speech and, by implication, how ideas expressed in speech shape power relations. Those victimized by hate speech often choose not to fight back" (1998: 85). Pecola is victimized by hate speech on numerous occasions; by her mother, peers, the members of the black community; she is exposed to hateful words and negative comments to the extent that she starts believing them and perceiving herself in the same way. Collins emphasizes: "Moreover, the effect of dehumanizing language is often flight rather than fight" (1998: 85), and Pecola does not even consider fighting those who verbally harass her, but she chooses to silently run away from them, thus demonstrating agreement with them.

The influence of the dominant white culture and the black girls' desperate wish to assimilate into it is best illustrated by their longing for everything that represents white culture. Pecola yearns for white dolls and candies with wrapping depicting a white girl. bell hooks explains the importance of these particular candies for Pecola: "Fond of a candy that features a picture of a little white girl who symbolizes the goodness and happiness that is not available to her, Pecola's addiction to sugar is fundamentally linked to her low self-esteem. The candy represents pleasure and escape into fantasy" (2015: 85). By consuming candies that Pecola believes white girls consume too, Pecola gets the taste of the white world and, at least for a short time, feels happy.

In the discussion of white objects' impact on black girls' psyche, it is noteworthy to mention Ann duCille's focus on the Barbie doll. Barbie doll has traditionally been known as the perfect, breathtakingly beautiful, blonde, blue-eyed doll that all the girls wanted to possess and play with. Ann duCille sees Barbie dolls as "objects that do the dirty work of patriarchy and capitalism in the most insidious way – in the guise of child's play" (2004: 268). Perceived on a larger scale, Barbie dolls and other similar white, blonde, and blue-eyed dolls also contribute to racist discrimination, creating the ideal of beauty that black girls fail to fulfill. Describing the Barbie doll, DuCille notably remarks: "she is an icon – perhaps *the* icon – of true white womanhood and femininity, a symbol of the far from innocent ideological stuff of which the (Miss) American dream and other mystiques of race and gender are made" (2004: 268). Considering these positive connotations associated with the white dolls, it appears logical that both the parents and the children in *The Bluest Eye* consider the white doll the ideal Christmas gift. It seems evident that exposure to white dolls would have a damaging effect on a young black girl's identity formation process, as she is unable to accept herself for what she really is, and she hopelessly dreams of possessing something unattainable to her. However, as the political circumstances and the overall racial climate progressed, black dolls were also introduced to the market. Still, duCille explains these alternative versions of the dolls were not so popular: "Although the "Black is beautiful" theme of both the civil right and Black power movements may have suggested a ready market for a beautiful Black doll, Colored Francie in fact did not sell well" (2004: 268). Even when black versions of the dolls became available for purchase, they did not make commercial success which testifies to the deeply ingrained racist practice in society, both among white and black people. It seems that people still believed the white doll was the superior one. DuCille further supports this statement by offering the example of the survey conducted in the 1940s by psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark that showed that almost 70 percent of black children preferred the white doll to the black doll. DuCille illustrates that little has changed over time by stating that the survey was repeated in 1985 with similar results. (DuCille 2004: 270). The repeated surveys and the shocking results in both of them show that Pecola's story is far from an isolated case and that many black girls are experiencing the same feelings of racial self-loathing and struggle with an inferiority complex.

3.2.4 Narratological perspective

The choice of narrative techniques, points of view, language, and overall writing style eruditely reveal how language and narration represent the issues of identity construction. Regarding the narrative representation, Valerie Smith remarked: "For Morrison, language and discursive strategies are not ancillary to systems of domination. Rather, they are central means by which racism, sexism, classism, and other ideologies of oppression are maintained, reproduced, and transmitted" (2012: 4). Morrison is very well aware of the power of language; thus, she employs several narrative methods to mirror the dominant ideologies and their impact on the development of female identity. Morrison commented on the power of language:

“Oppressive language does more than represent violence, it is violence; does more than represent the limits of knowledge, it limits knowledge” (2019: 109). Pecola’s peers, her family, and Geraldine all use oppressive language when communicating with her. Consequently, they convince her of the truth of these insulting, discriminatory words directed at her. Nonetheless, Morrison also utilizes the novel’s language to denote two culprits for oppression. Donald B. Gibson presents the text analysis mentioning these two culprits: “The text says we are oppressed by the values of the ruling class; the countertext says we participate in our own oppression usually to the extent of being literally the very hand or arm of that oppression” (1993: 162). Morrison insists on getting her message across: that the white people were responsible for the initial class, racial and sexual oppression of the black people, but that black people failed to resist it many years after slavery was abolished. In this manner, they carry a fraction of the responsibility for the oppression of the mind of younger generations.

The distinguishing feature of Morrison’s novel is the captivating and unexpected choice of narrators. Three dominant voices are present in the narrative: Claudia as a girl, Claudia as an adult, and the omniscient narrator, and all of them allow us different insights regarding events and characters. By changing perspectives, readers can analyze characters from different viewpoints. This makes a judgment of characters complex, as readers understand different layers of characters and may find justifications for their actions. Interestingly, while this is primarily a story about Pecola, we hear her voice the least. Morrison sheds light on the reasons for this narrative decision:

> And since the victim does not have the vocabulary to understand the violence or its context, gullible, vulnerable girlfriends, looking back as the knowing adults they pretended to be in the beginning, would have to do that for her, and would have to fill those silences with their own reflective lives (2019: 192).

Pecola experienced significant emotional and physical trauma at a very young age. By not giving her the voice in the novel, Morrison displayed her inability to comprehend the trauma and tell her story. On the other hand, Morrison also shows differences in perspectives on events when Claudia as a girl and Claudia as an adult, narrate the story. Claudia as a girl, has a naive outlook on events, believing that burying the money instead of buying a bicycle will save Pecola’s baby, thus displaying childhood innocence and pure heart. Adult Claudia shows maturity and wisdom and understands who the responsible, guilty parties for Pecola’s tragedy are. Still, Carmen Gillespie notes that Morrison did give voice to Pecola when she slipped into total insanity: “There is little access to her first-person internal thoughts until the end of the novel when her psyche has become irreparably fractured“ (2008: 52). Using the stream-of-consciousness technique, Morrison displays the total erasure of Pecola’s identity, illustrating the dialogue with an imaginary friend that reveals Pecola’s fractured state of mind.

Additionally, Morrison incorporates a mixture of narration and interior monologue when it comes to Pauline and Cholly’s stories, to portray the background that influenced their lifestyles and choices they make as adults. With regards to Pauline, Elliott Butler-Evans observes: “While the mode of presentation is largely fragmentary, one can link the individual episodes as the monologue comments on Pauline’s specific plight as woman, particularly as a Black woman“ (1989: 73). By learning about Pauline’s difficulty to get used to the new environment when she and Cholly moved, about her struggles to perceive herself as beautiful after she lost her tooth, and about the racist discrimination she faced while giving birth, readers gain a better understanding of her failure as a mother figure to her children and her internal belief that her family is ugly. On the other hand, the description of the incest and rape from the point of view of the person who committed them, together with Cholly’s disturbing story of

being abandoned by his parents and abused by white people, provokes compassion. While his actions cannot be justified, readers understand why he would do such a horrendous act.

When it comes to the first sentence of the novel that has already been mentioned, Morrison uses a secret to engage and interest the reader. However, Morrison also elaborates on the special meaning that the phrase has for the black community:

> If I say "Quiet is as kept," that is a piece of information which means exactly what it says, but to black people it means a big lie is about to be told. Or someone is going to tell some graveyard information, who's sleeping with whom. Black readers will chuckle. There is a level of appreciation that might be available only to people who understand the context of the language (1994: 124).

Apart from enticing readers' attention, the first sentence also reveals the main topic of the novel – the hidden secret revealing the factors responsible for the identity crisis of a young girl. The phrase "quiet as it's kept" can be understood as a metaphor for the story of Pecola and perhaps also the story of the black experience. By writing about a powerless black girl traumatized by racist and class issues, communal lack of support, and neglectful parents, Morrison shows how far racist discrimination might go and what kind of irrecoverable consequences on the female psyche it may cause. On the surface, Morrison tells the dramatic and harrowing story of rape and incest. Still, the subtext reveals the implicit meaning of the novel – that racial self-loathing and inferiority complex are the most severe repercussions of racism and that both white and black people are responsible for them.

One of the most potent symbols that Morrison employs as a narrative technique is the primer of the novel, which tells a story about Dick and Jane. Dick and Jane are the main characters in a series of books widely used to teach children to read in the United States in the 1960s. This story portrays a seemingly perfect family that lives in a beautiful house with pets and loving parents who smile and play with children. The Dick and Jane story does not explicitly mention that the family is white, but the knowledge of this is understood and implied, as the perfect family story is not the reality for black families. Andrea O'Reilly makes a connection between black and white families: "The primer in *The Bluest Eye* serves to emphasize the inappropriateness of this ideal for black families and reminds us of the inevitable feelings of inferiority that come with not achieving what is presented as the ideal and normal way of being" (2004: 48). The world presented in the story is unattainable for black families for a variety of reasons: racial, social, economic, etc. Pecola's family presents a complete opposite to the white family; her house is old with torn furniture, her parents never smile nor attempt to create a loving cozy atmosphere at home, she witnesses domestic violence regularly, and her brother frequently flees from home.

However, as the novel progresses, the form of the story changes; first, the punctuation is lost, then the spaces between words are gone, making the story incomprehensible. Marc C. Conner analyzes the evolution of the story: "But as this chant is repeated in subsequent paragraphs, it becomes a frantic, unpunctuated stream of language without order, suggesting that behind this myth of a comforting, nurturing home lies a reality that is disordered and disrupting" (2000: 53). Perhaps Morrison wishes to suggest that perfect families do not exist and there are concealed problems behind a pretty façade in every household. The best example in the novel is found in the portrayal of Geraldine and her family; Geraldine, belonging to the upper class of black people, keeps up appearances in public while she neglects her son and instills in him the appreciation for racist, discriminatory practices that she desperately tries to escape in her life. On the other hand, as the story becomes more fragmented, the characters

themselves become more fragmented and complicated to comprehend. It seems that how the story about Dick and Jane was told coincides with Pecola's mental state while she gradually slips into insanity.

Morrison repeatedly uses the Dick and Jane story before each chapter, ensuring that the readers are constantly reminded of the vast difference between a black and white family that gets greater as the chapters go by. Linden Peach insightfully observed: "Within this ironic interplay of difference, the text brings a particular perspective not only to the impact of white ideologies on the black community, but also to the nature of whiteness and its inappropriateness to determine the contours of African-American culture and lived experience" (1995: 38). Peach suggests that Morrison purposefully uses the ideal white family to portray different conditions that surround black families, making them unable to ever reach the realization of the perfect white family, and their desperate striving for that ideal is one of the causes of their unhappiness. Morrison emphasizes yet again that both white and black people are culprits for interferences with the individuation processes of female characters. Elliott Butler-Evans points to the binary oppositions that form the basis of the divergence between the families: "Contrasts between the Dick-and-Jane world and the "real" world of the Breedloves are structured around several sets of binary oppositions: White/Black, affluence/poverty, desirability/undesirability, order/chaos, valued/devalued" (1989: 68). These oppositions also lie at the core of discrimination against black people and represent the contrast between what Pecola is and has, and what she wishes she could be.

When it comes to the overall form of the novel, Trudier Harris makes a valid comparison: "*The Bluest Eye* (1970) is an inversion of fairy tales – the ugly duckling does not become the beautiful swan" (1991: 11). The novel implies that the fairy tale world with a mandatory happily ever after is not available for black girls. Morrison uses many elements of inversion, signifying unattainable ideals for black girls that are presented in the elements of popular culture, such as dishes, dolls, books, etc.

Another narrative technique that Morrison employs that makes her writing more vivid is the employment of grotesque elements. They are evident in many instances of the novel; in the insanity and irrational behavior of Pecola, the natural occurrence of marigold seeds not growing that particular season, which Frieda and Claudia understood as nature's response to their plea for Pecola's baby; and Soaphead Church's manipulation of Pecola to murder the dog on his behalf. These disturbing, grotesque images serve to emphasize events that interfere with the individuation process of female characters.

3.2.5 Literary trauma studies and psychoanalytical perspective

Traumatic experiences represent critical aspects of characters' identity crises. While all the characters in *The Bluest Eye* experience collective trauma stemming from racist, discriminatory practices, they tackle it in different manners. Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber describes this trauma as "the gaze of the Other" (2001: 12), explaining the most damaging outcome of experiencing such a trauma: "Therefore, the gaze of the Other puts the subject in touch with the fundamental nothingness of the self, for the gaze undermines the illusion of control" (2001: 12). Black people accept "the gaze of the Other," they accept the negative perception of themselves as viewed by the white people and they embrace that perception as their own. The most appropriate examples from the novel are Pauline and Pecola; Pauline willfully embraces what she perceives to be her ugly physical appearance after she loses her tooth, while Pecola desperately wishes to change the color of her eyes to fit in the dominant culture. Collective trauma is also evident in the community itself, whose members, deeply traumatized by the racist trauma, ostracize Pecola instead of embracing her as one of their own and helping her

through her problems. Laurie Vickroy continues the discussion on collective trauma by saying: "Although trauma damages the individual psyche, collective trauma has further destructive consequences in that it breaks the attachments of social life, degrades the sense of community and support from that community, and dominates the mood and interactions of the group" (2002: 13). Even though the community should feel connected as they are all members of the same race and thus suffer many similar forms of discrimination, they do not support each other but resort to criticism. They prefer to find something they feel superior to and hold it against people like the Breedloves, who occupy the lowest social position in society. This is illustrated in the portrayal of characters, such as Geraldine and Soaphead Church. Robert Samuels defines Geraldine's racist obsessions: "In fact, in her description of Geraldine, Morrison accurately outlines the major components of an obsessional neurosis" (2001: 111). Geraldine's obsessional neurosis is displayed in how she educates her son on the difference between shades of black skin, forbids him to socialize with black children considered to be of lower social status, and her hateful words and degrading treatment of Pecola. Geraldine's obsession stems from her own racial self-loathing and her aspirations toward whiteness. Vickroy, notably remarks on what happens to such characters in the novel: "Characters who embrace behavior consonant with racial and social hierarchies, materialist and superficial standards, all of which Morrison associates with white culture, are portrayed as unhappy, repressed, and inauthentic" (2002: 43). Geraldine reveals her superficial traits by evaluating people based on the color of their skin rather than their character traits. However, in addition to her personal acceptance of white standards and wish to blend into them, Geraldine also passes this obsessive neurosis onto her son, teaching him that he should behave in the same manner. When it comes to Soaphead Church, Samuels addresses his traumatic issues: "In her description of Soaphead Church, we encounter an upper class form of internalized hysterical racism" (2001: 113). Soaphead's hysterical racism was passed on to him by his father, who was obsessed with the idea of whiteness. This obsessive racism is continued by Soaphead's wish to identify with white values constantly. Samuels further states: "I will posit that this theory of reiterated white identification is central to Morrison's critique of African Americans who try to act and look white" (2001: 113). Due to his hysterical obsession with whiteness, Soaphead is perhaps the only character who can genuinely understand Pecola's desire for blue eyes but he still chooses to manipulate her for his benefit.

When it comes to individual traumatic experiences, the most devastating and horrific trauma happens to Pecola when her father rapes her. Regarding traumas, Dori Laub pinpoints the necessity to verbalize victims' experiences: "There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one's story, unimpeded by ghosts from the past against which one has to protect oneself. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life" (1995: 63). After Pecola's failed attempt to share her story with her mother, who chooses not to believe her, her tragedy enlarges. Laub explains the repercussions of one's inability to communicate their traumas with others: "This loss of the capacity to be a witness to oneself and thus to witness from the inside is perhaps the true meaning of annihilation, for when one's history is abolished, one's identity ceases to exist as well" (1995: 67). Pecola's identity is negated, annihilated, as the most defining experience of her life is not acknowledged by the most important people in her life. Therefore, isolated from her family, friends, and community, she finds her escape from the world around her in hallucinations which lead her to insanity. Renita Weems explains Morrison's decision to confine Pecola's life to madness: "Madness is never just madness to Morrison. It is a way of *coping* when sanity will no longer do" (1979: 56). For Pecola, the rational world is too painful and difficult to handle, so she decides to live in her own imagination, believing her greatest wish has come true. The conclusion can be drawn that Pecola is severely traumatized by both of her parents. It is indisputable that her father inflicts agonizing pain on her by raping her. However, her mother's neglectful parental

style and unwillingness to create a healthy environment for her children negatively influenced Pecola's identity formation. Pecola's parents' attitudes toward her, together with the forms of physical and psychological abuse that Pecola experienced, accounted for repeated trauma that Judith Herman discussed: "…but repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality. The child trapped in an abusive environment is faced with formidable tasks of adaptation" (1992: 96). Repetitive intrusion of trauma is evident not only in the act of rape that Cholly repeats but also in the behavior of people toward Pecola that provides constant reminders of what had happened. Due to her inability to accept her new circumstances (the community's gossiping about her, being expelled from school, being sexually harassed and impregnated by her father), Pecola slips into insanity. Pecola succumbs to the belief of what Florian Coulmas describes as the "ideal self": "…the superego part of one's identity includes an 'ideal self', that is, an image of what you want to be" (2019: 86). What Pecola secretly and greatly desires to be is the girl with the bluest eyes in the world. Not only does Pecola start believing that she possesses the bluest eyes, but she also starts conversing with an imaginary friend. Laurie Vickroy elucidates Pecola's urge to verbalize her trauma: "Pecola's compulsion to repeat begins after her rape, in conversations with her imaginary friend and with obsessive but ineffectual self-questioning about what happened with her father" (2002: 30). Pecola feels the urgent need to talk about the unfortunate event, to discuss her traumatic experience as this is the only way for her to try to understand and overcome it. As Judith Herman observed: "Recovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation" (1992: 133). Since Pecola is completely isolated from her family and the community, her only chance at recovery is to create an imaginary friend who would listen to her. This coping mechanism, unfortunately, proves to be unsuccessful in the resolution of Pecola's trauma.

Regarding the repercussions of Pecola's untreated traumas, Malin Walther Pereira makes an interesting analogy: "Pecola's insanity at the end of the novel mirrors, Morrison suggests, a cultural insanity that threatens the black community's identity and strength" (2010: 229). Pereira suggests that Pecola's insanity can be viewed as a possible warning of what might happen to the black population if black people continue to worship white ideology and neglect black characteristics.

When analyzing the dangers to Pecola's identity development, Roberta Rubenstein adds a relevant perspective worthy of discussion: "Thus, constriction of the growth of the self is implicitly linked to restrictive or oppressive cultural circumstances" (1993: 127). Through Pecola's characterization, the conclusion is inescapable that Pecola's identity crisis happened due to the confluence of factors: oppressive racism, cultural and social circumstances, an unsupportive community, abusive peers, and dysfunctional family. Identity development is closely related to historical and cultural circumstances, which are highly unfavorable to black people, especially children. *The Bluest Eye* demonstrates the consequences that might occur when oppressive circumstances are joined with a lack of familial and communal support and care.

Another important traumatic experience that should be taken into consideration is Cholly's trauma caused by white people's observation of his first sexual encounter. This, together with his mother's absence from his life and his father's abandonment of him, has made Cholly a deeply traumatized individual and, thus, utterly unsuitable husband and father figure. Regarding the significance of parental presence in one's life, Judith Herman comments: "A secure sense of connection with caring people is the foundation of personality development. When this connection is shattered, the traumatized person loses her basic sense of self" (1992: 52). As a young boy, Cholly did not establish loving and caring relationships with people who were important to him, and he transferred this lack of love and familial connection into his own family. In the same manner as her father, Pecola never established a healthy and harmonious relationship with her family, classmates, and friends. As a result, Pecola suffers from

psychological and physical trauma. According to Herman, “Helplessness and isolation are the core experiences of psychological trauma. Empowerment and reconnection are the core experiences of recovery” (1992: 197). Since Pecola experiences both isolation and helplessness, she has few chances for recovery as these persist in her life. It can be concluded that Cholly’s trauma influences the whole family dynamics, as his son frequently escapes from home, his wife becomes more devoted to her employers’ family than to her own, and finally, his trauma brings about the total destruction of his daughter’s identity.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy to observe the importance of traumas that the witnesses experience, especially if these witnesses are young children who feel powerless to do anything to help resolve the trauma. Claudia and Frieda are Pecola’s friends and witnesses of Pecola’s traumas. The girls observed their classmates’ negative comments directed at Pecola and Pecola’s mother’s treatment of her, and they also heard of the rape and pregnancy. Since they are so young and inexperienced, their understanding of the traumatic events is not complete and objective. The girls naively believe that they might be able to help Pecola if they give up on the money they were saving for the new bike, and bury it. Even though their venture proves unsuccessful, it demonstrates the girls’ best intentions and love and care for Pecola. Since Claudia is narrating this story as an adult, her story shows that even after so many years, Pecola’s trauma left a mark on her, that she was not able to forget it, and that she feels this story is worth being heard.

3.3 Female characters’ identity crises

3.3.1 Pauline

Pauline’s identity crisis occurs due to her unhappy marriage, her distorted image of her physical appearance, and internalized racism that she adopts. While her identity crisis definitely affects her own life and results in her being unhappy and bitter, it also impacts her children and their identity formation.

When discussing Pauline’s identity development, it is significant to mention the momentous and radical change in her personality and character. When she married Cholly, she was in love with her husband and set out to create a wonderful life with her family and children. However, circumstances caused a dramatic change in her outlook on life. Cholly and Pauline moved north to Lorrain to pursue better financial and job opportunities and advancements. Yet, she felt very isolated, lonely, and not accepted by the neighbors and the community members, who were unfriendly toward her. She attempted to find comfort in visiting cinemas and observing beautiful actors and actresses: “Along with the idea of romantic love, she was introduced to another – physical beauty. Probably the most destructive ideas in the history of human thought. Both originated in envy, thrived in insecurity, and ended in disillusion” (Morrison 2007: 122). The concepts of beauty, physical appearance, and whiteness became fascinating to Pauline, and she spent her time watching beautiful actresses, attempting to impersonate and look like them. However, when she lost her tooth, she turned into a disillusioned woman who perceived herself as ugly.

Pauline’s perception of herself was further worsened during her childbirth experience. Commenting on Pauline’s childbirth, Paula Gallant Eckard observed: “Attended by an assortment of doctors in a large hospital ward, Pauline’s experience is marred by racism, paternalism, and gross depersonalization” (2002: 47). Doctors neglected her pain, comparing black women to animals, suggesting they were unable to feel any suffering. Overhearing this comparison, one of the most painful but simultaneously beautiful experiences of a woman’s life is turned into a racist, insulting experience for Pauline.

As a result of her shattered dreams, faced with the discriminatory reality she was surrounded by when Pauline gave birth to Pecola, she proclaimed her daughter ugly: "But I knowed she was ugly. Head full of pretty hair, but Lord she was ugly" (Morrison 2007: 126). It is unfortunate and disturbing to hear a mother talking about her newborn baby in this way. Still, Pauline's treatment in the hospital undoubtedly contributed to her perception of her daughter. As Andrea O'Reilly asserts: "So when her child is born, and it is both black and female, Pauline sees it as she herself was seen while in labor as undesirable, irrelevant, and unimportant" (2004: 53). In this way Pauline embraces the "white gaze" of the doctors, she accepts it and passes it down on her newborn baby girl. Additionally, Pauline's attitude and opinion greatly influenced her daughter's identity formation, as Barbara Christian suggests: "Pecola, her own child, is assigned a bottom category in the scale of absolute beauty and the possession of beauty is equated with self-worth" (1993: 67). Pecola cannot see herself as beautiful nor build self-confidence if her own mother sees her as ugly. Christian also points to another widespread problem – equalizing physical appearance with the qualities of a person. Both Pauline and Pecola are deemed ugly by the community. Therefore, they are perceived as less important, not worthy of having them as friends or even getting to know them and making impressions of their personality traits.

Another important point that should be considered when conversing about Pauline's identity is that she never manages to develop her identity independently of other people, but always depends on others to help form her personality and add meaning and purpose to her life. First, she depends on her husband, but when she finds her marriage and family life unsatisfying, she turns to white idealization. Due to these interferences with her individuation process, she fails to become a role model for her children. Laurie Vickroy explains the problematics of setting a bad example for her children:

> She has no identity to offer Pecola other than her own feelings of unworthiness, which Pecola absorbs through her mother's neglect and rejections. Eventually Pecola splits from her own black identity and longs for a white identity (or rather the love and recognition she believes this would bring) much as her mother does. (2002: 41).

Pecola inherits from her mother the aspirations towards whiteness and the wrong belief that everything white is superior to what she is. This belief is further supported by everything around her (dolls, candies, the teacher's pets, her peers, and the community). Additionally, Pauline keeps on staying in an unhealthy dysfunctional marriage even though she herself is physically and psychologically abused, and her children suffer significant consequences from being a part of such a destructive family.

When observing Pauline as a mother, she gives motherly love and attention to the girl for whose family she works, as she represents the beautiful and ideal daughter she always wished for. In this respect, we see that Pauline is very much capable of providing support, love, and care, but she simply chooses not to do so for her children. One of the most disturbing scenes in the novel happens when Pecola accidentally spills the berry cobbler, thus burning herself in the house where Pauline works. Pauline's reaction includes hitting Pecola and criticizing her using harsh words while simultaneously ensuring the white girl is unharmed and well. Claudia witnesses the scene and describes it in the following manner: "Mrs. Breedlove yanked her up by the arm, slapped her again, and in a voice thin with anger, abused Pecola directly and Frieda and me by implication" (Morrison 2007: 109). Not only does Pauline physically hurt and verbally insult Pecola, but she also humiliates her in front of her friends and openly shows her love and devotion to the white girl. Missy Dehn Kubitschek explains

Pauline's love and dedication: "Pauline's emotional loyalties lie with the white children rather than with her own" (1998: 35). Another reason why Pauline prefers her employers' family and children to her own is because the white family boosts her self-confidence thus affecting her individuation process, by providing her with love and compliments that her own family has never done. Trudier Harris emphasizes the importance of the nickname her employers use when they address Pauline: "Guided by a perversion of the functions nicknames serve in black communities, Pauline, as Polly, illustrates the potential identity-shaping purpose such nicknaming provides" (1991: 20). While her children address her in a very formal way as "Mrs. Breedlove," the white family creates a nickname for her, "Polly," that is warm, and it suggests closeness. The difference between her and her employers' families lies in the same discriminatory practices that follow black people's lives: racial and class differences. Barbara Christian comments on the scene when Pauline comforts the white girl over Pecola: "This scene is beautifully constructed to contrast the extremes of class positions in terms of what is desirable" (1985: 74). Pecola and the white girl are placed in the same scene to denote the juxtaposition between the black and white world.

Pauline's failure as a mother is also evident in Claudia's mother's words that Pauline never bothered to come and check on Pecola while the girl stayed with them when Cholly burnt down the house. Consequently, Pecola shares the most critical moment of a teenage girl's life, her first menstruation, with Claudia's mother, instead of her own. In addition to this, when Pecola confesses to Pauline that Cholly raped her, Pauline chooses not to believe her daughter, thus making this event even more painful and traumatizing. Commenting on people's inability to accept distressing news, Sigmund Freud said: "It is a characteristic of human nature to be inclined to regard anything which is disagreeable as untrue, and then without much difficulty to find arguments against it" (1943: 24). Based on Freud's words, it can be concluded that it was difficult for Pauline to accept such a horrifying idea – that her husband raped their child, and it was more bearable for her to believe that Pecola was lying.

A fundamental aspect of Pauline's personality is her willingness to accept the white culture's stereotypes easily. Andrea O'Reilly insightfully comments on the influence of dominant ideology on Pauline's identity development: "Pauline takes on rather than resists the identity assigned to her by the dominant culture" (2004: 52). Pauline behaves in the exact way that white and high-class black people expect her to, she embraces the ugliness assigned to her family, and she neglects her husband and her children. Morrison comments in the novel:

> You looked at them and wondered why they were so ugly; you looked closely and could not find the source. Then you realized 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 (2007: 39).

Society characterizes the Breedloves as ugly because they are black, poor, and dysfunctional as a family, but they take it upon themselves and accept this characterization. Their family exemplifies the consequences of worshipping white people over their culture and family. Morrison suggests that the dominant culture further confirms the Breedloves' conviction that they are ugly: "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" (2007: 39).

Pauline's character in the novel is essential as it serves to show how unfavorable circumstances might change someone's personality and impede their identity development. Pin-chia Feng adds to the discussion on the significance of Pauline's character:

> Yet by allowing Pauline to have her own voice in the novel, Morrison shows that Pauline was once full of dreams and feelings. Her lack of love, as represented by the loss of her "rainbow," is not natural but emerges out of her "education" in a society saturated with class and racial inequality (1998: 58).

Her environment teaches Pauline that due to racial, social, and class circumstances, she is less valuable, beautiful, and intelligent than the members of the white class, and she gradually starts accepting these beliefs as her own. Pauline's character also demonstrates the importance of parental figures in children's identity formation as she passes down her personal insecurities and self-loathing to her daughter.

3.3.2 Pecola

Pecola is the most traumatized character in the novel who suffers the most severe identity crisis at the most vulnerable time – in childhood. Pecola's identity development is threatened by a variety of interconnected factors that jointly contribute to the complete annihilation of her identity.

Pecola is discriminated against based on race, gender, class, and age. In all of these regards, Pecola belongs to the categories considered inferior – she is a black, poor, young girl. In addition to this, Pecola does not receive any love, support, or care from anyone around her – her family, peers, and the community. The only people who see past these discriminatory practices are her two friends – Claudia and Frieda, and the three prostitutes.

Pecola is a symbol of black people's beliefs in their own ugliness and inferiority. Wilfred D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems describe the core of Pecola's identity crisis: "To be sure, on the one hand, we find upon close analysis that Pecola, a young girl in quest of womanhood, suffers an identity crisis when she falls victim to the standard set by an American society that ascribes what is beautiful to a certain image of white women" (1990: 11). Dominant culture that Pecola is exposed to suggests that only white people are beautiful and she finds evidence of that powerful conviction everyone around her: on the billboards, in movies, on dishes, dolls, etc. Pecola's identity development is severely threatened by beliefs: the belief that her family is ugly, that only white is beautiful, and that the possession of blue eyes is the only thing that will make Pecola pretty and lovable. As a result of racist prejudices and stereotypes about what is considered beautiful, Pecola develops an inferiority complex, wishing to have blue eyes. She believes that only if she could have blue eyes all of her problems would disappear: "It had occurred to Pecola some time ago that if her eyes, those eyes that held the pictures, and knew the sights – if those eyes of hers were different, that is to say, beautiful, she herself would be different" (Morrison 2007: 46). She believed if she had blue eyes, she would be pretty and consequently people would be friendly to her, and her family would love her. Pecola associates beauty with love; she believes that one cannot exist without the other. For Pecola, blue eyes are a metaphor for acceptance and love.

Pecola's identity is suppressed by the failure of the overall society (both black and white people) to accept her as being different and find beauty in her uniqueness. Valerie Smith suggests that the black community finds it easier to pass onto Pecola all the feelings relating to their own racial self-loathing and inferiority complex they might have: "But her insanity really results from the fact that she serves as the communal scapegoat, bearing not only her own self-loathing, but that of her neighbors and family as well" (1993: 274). The community saw Pecola as worse than themselves, but it seems that she was the most obvious choice to transfer their

own insecurities regarding their race, gender, and social position in society, as she was the most vulnerable member of society at the most delicate age. When discussing collective behavior toward Pecola, Julia Eichelberger offers her perspective: "In *The Bluest Eye* the people who harm Pecola and who designate her as a deserving outcast do not choose to behave this way in a vacuum; the pervasive influence of a corrupt public culture has been there before them, designating the worthy and the unworthy" (1999: 92). Eichelberger believes that the community's negative attitudes towards Pecola can be understood as being influenced by the dominant culture. The same white ideology that instills in Pecola the desire for blue eyes corrupts the black community as a whole. As a result, aware that they can do nothing to fit in, they take out their racial self-loathing on those at the bottom of the racial, social, and gender hierarchies.

Morrison describes Pecola's obsession with her physical appearance: "Long hours she sat looking in the mirror, trying to discover the secret of the ugliness, the ugliness that made her ignored or despised at school, by teachers and classmates alike" (2007: 45). All the people from Pecola's life perceive her as ugly and therefore less worthy; not only her classmates, teacher and the white population, but also the black community, and even her own mother. However, the blame should not be placed only on others, as Pecola should be considered partially responsible for considering herself ugly. Regarding the culprits, Wilfred D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems notably remark: "Morrison's discourse thus strongly suggests that Pecola's alienation and sense of unworthiness emerge not solely from "the Other's" definition but also from her own inability to transcend the resulting reification" (1990: 15). Pecola fails to act and respond to events; she is quiet when her classmates bully her, when her mother blames her for spilling the berry cobbler, when Mr. Yacobowski ensures he does not touch her hand when giving her the change, and most significantly, she is silent about her father raping her except for one failed attempt to tell her mother.

The inferiority complex that Pecola suffers from also stems from the white people's insistence on manufacturing and buying white dolls with blue eyes and blonde hair that all the children want to possess. Additionally, Pecola is impressed with Shirley Temple's cup and Mary Jane candies, all displaying white ideology. They are considered the perfect paragons of beauty, and everything different is considered to be ugly.

Excerpts from Dick and Jane story that precede each chapter in the novel are excerpts from a book that was used for children to learn how to read and write, in which no black children or families are portrayed, giving children the idea that this is the perfect emblem of the family, with the necessary white color of the skin. Pecola's family is juxtaposed with this ideal family, as the Breedloves are poor, black, and dysfunctional. When it comes to Pecola's family, she does not have a close relationship with her mother. Pauline's comments on Pecola's ugliness as soon as she gave birth to her give an impression that Pecola was doomed to be considered ugly from the moment she entered the world. Additionally, Morrison addresses the taboo topic of menstruation, a critical threshold in a young girl's life that Pecola does not get to experience with her mother. Also, her parents' constant fights that Pecola and her brother witness daily create an unhealthy environment for children's identity development. The fact that Pecola and Sammy address their mother, "Mrs. Breedlove," and that Pauline shows more affection and care toward her employer's child than her own children testify to Pecola and Sammy's superficial relationship with their mother. Furthermore, Morison illustrates that Pecola is unfamiliar with the emotion of love: "Then Pecola asked a question that had never entered my mind. "How do you do that? I mean, how do you get somebody to love you?" But Frieda was asleep. And I didn't know" (Morrison 2007: 32). Pecola's question about love shows that she is not a loved child.

Nevertheless, the most dreadful and horrifying event that completely annihilates Pecola's identity is rape. This traumatic experience shatters her identity, allowing her to fall

into insanity. When it comes to the results of traumatic experiences, Judith Herman states: "The result, for most victims, is a contaminated identity. Victims may be preoccupied with shame, self-loathing, and a sense of failure" (1992: 94). Pecola's already fragile state of mind is further worsened by this horrible event. By raping her, her father strips her of her identity, as everyone, including herself, sees her differently now.

Still, Pecola's trauma is furthered by her inability to confide in anyone. Her own mother does not believe her, and Pecola does not speak of rape to anyone else but her imaginary friend. Patricia Hill Collins explains the problems of sharing and speaking of traumatic experiences:

> Within the strictures of dominant gender ideology that depict Black women's sexuality as deviant, African American women often have tremendous difficulty speaking out about their abuse because the reactions that they receive from others deters them. Women may be twice victimized – even if they are believed, members of their communities may punish them for speaking out (2004: 230).

Black women face a significant challenge when it comes to sharing their traumatic experiences, as the deeply ingrained prejudices regarding their lives prevent people from believing them. Sadly, these prejudices do not only relate to white people but also to black people. Pecola is victimized and traumatized twice – first when her father rapes her and then when her mother fails to believe her story. Because of this, Pecola decided not to tell her about the second time when the rape happened. As the rape resulted in pregnancy, Pecola had to stop attending school. She was so isolated and lonely that she started talking to herself, imagining she was talking to a friend. The imaginary friend is her last resort, as all other people in her life cut her off from any contact, support, and love. Carmen Gillespie explains the difficulty of Pecola's situation: "The split personality is Pecola's way of coping with the devastating impact of the rape" (2008: 51). The reality of rape, pregnancy, and total alienation from the community, are too difficult for Pecola to grasp, so she discovers her safe haven in the power of imagination.

Additionally, Philip Page makes an important observation regarding Pecola's inability to tell her story: "In Morrison's fiction, characters who cannot or do not tell their stories tend to fail – to die, to flee, to remain fixed in static, monologic, unfulfilling lives" (1995: 179). Pecola does not tell her story to anyone; she keeps it to herself and only reveals fragments of it to her imaginary friend. Even the readers do not get familiar with Pecola's feelings and thoughts to a large extent, as the main narrator is Claudia, and readers hear the story through her perspective. Morrison is not very generous when depicting Pecola, allowing the readers to get insight into her distressed psyche at the very end of the novel. Additionally, Pecola's need to speak to her imaginary friends emphasizes her need to tell her story, make sense of what had happened to her, and understand the traumas that destroyed her life and alienated her from everyone.

Finally, Pecola completely slips into insanity by creating an illusion that she indeed got the blue eyes that she wishes for. K. Zauditu-Selassie insightfully comments on Pecola's intense desire for blue eyes: "Having blue eyes means having everything. Having blue eyes is the metaphoric representation of having love, acceptance, friends, and family illustrated by Pecola's ritual request for blue eyes" (2009: 43). For Pecola, possessing blue eyes means obtaining everything that she lacks in her life but that she desperately wishes to have, love being the most important of all. She believes that her family and friends would love her, that her parents would not fight in front of her, and that she would have a carefree childhood that every child in the world deserves. From a psychological point of view, Robert Samuels uses Freud's statement to explain Pecola's state of mind:

> This fading away of her own subjectivity and body represent the first stages of her psychotic withdrawal from social reality. For it is Freud's argument that the first phase of any psychosis is something akin to the destruction of the subject's psychological world that then has to be re-created through an imaginary fantasy or delusion ("On Narcissism" 57) (2001: 110).

As traumatic events completely shatter Pecola's psyche, her only escape is an illusion since her imagination can account for and find justifications for her trauma's consequences. Pecola's new blue eyes create a sort of blindness for her, as she does not perceive reality for what it really is. She starts believing that people look away from her because of jealousy, as she now possesses the bluest eyes in the world. When it comes to her desire to have the bluest eyes, Rebecca Degler explains the need for the superlative: "Her purity is one of type, not quality; she is an extreme example of a quality the community wishes to discourage because it reminds them of the degree to which the dominant culture infiltrates their community, as well as their shame in colluding with that culture" (2006: 234). Degler associated the superlative form, the desire to have the highest degree of color to the level of the black community's obsession and need to fit into the dominant culture. For Pecola, simply having blue eyes is not enough; she desires to have the bluest eyes that would be the most beautiful in the world. Vickroy suggests that Pecola's belief that she possesses them now "symbolizes the trauma of not being loved" (2002: 91). While it is obvious that Pecola is not loved by either her family or the community, at least when conventional notions of love are taken into consideration, what is even more disturbing is that even Pecola does not love herself. And her self-hatred reaches the extent that she wishes to change such a fundamental aspect of her physical appearance – her eyes. As Aoi Mori concludes: "She does not come to possess them as she prays; instead they come to possess her, destroying her mind and obliterating her identity" (1999: 31). Even though Pecola believes that her greatest wish has come true, her imagination signifies the annihilation of her identity development, that leaves low chances for hopes that she would recover and overcome her traumas.

When analyzing Pecola's character, it is noteworthy to mention that the combination of physical and psychological abuse brought about her identity crisis. As Missy Dehn Kubitschek keenly observed: "*The Bluest Eye* delineates how Pecola is repeatedly exposed to psychological violation, and how physical violation completes the psychological destruction" (1998: 30). Pecola is exposed to psychological abuse on various occasions by her peers who bully her, Mr. Yacobowski who is careful not to touch her hand, Geraldine who insults her, the community who gossips about her, her parents who neglect her and make her witness domestic violence, Soaphead Church who manipulates her into killing the dog and gives false promises that further deepen her traumatic experience; while sexual abuse and pregnancy contributed to her psychological trauma even more, making it almost impossible to cure.

John N. Duvall states the most significant issue with regard to Pecola's identity: "What Pecola lacks most decidedly is a sense of self" (2000: 55). Pecola is unable to develop a healthy and confident sense of identity due to many complex reasons. She is a black female child with an unsupportive family who does not show love toward her and the judgmental stereotypical society. Could the situation have been different if some of these factors had been different? Morrison suggests so by portraying the character of Claudia, who faced many similar circumstances, being a young black girl, but whose identity development was not impaired in any way due to her self-confidence and loving and supporting parents.

3.3.3 Claudia

Claudia is Pecola's friend and the narrator of the story. While she faces the same difficult circumstances as Pecola when it comes to racial, gender, and social inferiority in society, other factors and Claudia's personality make her path toward the individuation process utterly different compared to Pecola. Even as a girl, Claudia is very well aware of the inferior position that the black people occupy: "Being a minority in both caste and class, we moved about anyway on the hem of life, struggling to consolidate our weaknesses and hang on, or to creep singly up into the major folds of the garment" (Morrison 2007: 17). Claudia explains that life is difficult for them, but it seems that she believes that they are used to these hardships and that she herself is not very concerned about them: "Our peripheral existence, however, was something we had learned to deal with – probably because it was abstract" (Morrison 2007: 17). It is apparent from Claudia's description that her perception of their inferiority does not impact her too much as she considers the categories upon which they are discriminated against to be abstract.

The main difference between Pecola and Claudia is that Claudia grows up in a loving and devoted family. Claudia's mother cares deeply for her children, even though the girls, at their young age, sometimes fail to understand it in that way. Mrs. McTeer would often sing, making their household a lively and happy place, while she would get distraught when her children would get sick as she is worried about their wellbeing. Her loving nature is also illustrated in her willingness to accept Pecola into their house when Cholly burnt down the Breedloves' house. Although the McTeers are poor, Claudia's mother provides food and shelter for Pecola, even aiding her through the most sensitive period of her life – the first menstruation. Mr. McTeer is also a loving father who demonstrates the role of a protector of his girls by hitting Mr. Henry when he was inappropriate with his daughter. Although the family needed the money as Mr. Henry was their tenant, Mr. McTeer threw him out of the house because he harassed his daughter. Claudia also has a strong bond with her sister; they share stories and play together, unlike Pecola, who has almost no contact with her brother who frequently runs away from home. Claudia's family plays a significant part in boosting her self-esteem, as even as a girl, Claudia is self-confident, not longing for blue eyes or white dolls.

Regarding the incredible popularity of white dolls that both the black and white girls want to possess, Claudia received one as a gift. However, Claudia does not understand why these dolls are considered so beautiful, so she breaks down her doll, trying to find where the beauty is. Claudia shares very mature thoughts regarding the obsessive love that people feel for white dolls:

> 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, older 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 (Morrison 2007: 20).

It is essential to observe that Claudia's self-confidence is so supreme that she is not influenced by those around her who adore the white dolls, even her mother or her friend Pecola. The adults feel angry that she broke the doll as they themselves did not have similar toys while they were growing up. When Claudia manages to break the doll, she finds the mechanism responsible for the doll's voice that everyone is fond of. Wilfred D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems elaborate on the comparison that Claudia makes: "Claudia comes to realize that Pecola lacked voice. Like the doll, she speaks with a programmed, appropriated voice in her monomaniacal

quest for blue eyes, which in its artificiality makes Pecola ugly" (1990: 23). Claudia compares the doll to Pecola, as they both speak in artificial voices that are formed by the dominant ideology. Since Pecola lacks her personal voice and, therefore, opinions, she embarks on a futile quest for blue eyes. Still, partial blame for her desperate wish can be placed on society as a whole. As black dolls with dark eyes were not available, girls never had a chance to learn that something different can also be beautiful. Jill Matus describes Claudia's behavior toward the white doll as anger: "Claudia's anger, directed outward, protects her sense of self" (1998: 44). On her path toward self-individuation, Claudia often feels angry when she notices instances of dominant culture influencing her life. Besides the dolls, Claudia is also aware of the people's fascination with Maureen Peal, her black classmate whose shade of skin is much lighter and, therefore, more desirable. Maureen Peal is considered to be beautiful and thus superior to Claudia, Frieda, and Pecola, whose shades of skin are darker. However, unlike Pecola, who accepts the opinions of society that everything lighter is beautiful, Claudia questions the dominant ideology: "What was the secret? What did we lack? Why was it important? And so what?" (Morrison 2007: 74). Her inquisitive mind causes anger and a desire to discover the logical explanation behind the established hierarchies. In the same way that she wants to find out why the white dolls are so desirable, she wonders why Maureen Peal is considered superior; therefore, she never accepts dominant culture but constantly questions it. The conclusion that Claudia reaches once again shows the great maturity and wisdom of her young age: "And all the time we knew 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" (Morrison 2007: 74). Claudia realizes that societal stratification is an abstract concept, but that it is a powerful one that might provoke hatred, even toward the people who might not deserve it. She understands that discriminatory practices are above individuals as they are deeply ingrained into society.

Claudia's ability to appreciate her true self and not wish for unattainable ideals account for the strength of her character. K.C. Lalthlamuani believes that Morrison expresses her opinions about dominant culture through the portrayal of Claudia: "In privileging feelings and experience over ownership of objects, Claudia and Morrison reject bourgeois standards of happiness" (2014: 57). Perhaps Morrison, through the juxtaposition of two very different worldviews of Pecola and Claudia, wishes to suggest that construction of identity crucially depends on one's ability to appreciate their heritage, characteristics and natural beauty without striving to change oneself or aspire to be like others.

When Claudia and her sister Frieda discover what happened to Pecola, they feel overwhelming grief and a wish to help her. Claudia says: "Our astonishment was short-lived, for it gave way to a curious kind of defensive shame; we were embarrassed for Pecola, hurt for her, and finally we just felt sorry for her" (Morrison 2007: 190). Claudia and Frieda got the seeds that they were supposed to sell and then use the money to buy a new bicycle. However, in their naïve attempt to help Pecola, the girls decided to bury the money and plant the seeds as a sacrifice to God in exchange for Pecola to give birth to a healthy baby. The marigolds did not grow, and the children blamed themselves, not realizing that the land was barren that year and that no other plants grew either. Claudia and Frieda's hopefulness and wish for Pecola to have her baby denote children's innocence, but they also might indicate the potential message of the novel. Marigold seeds did not grow because of the barren land in the same manner that Pecola's identity could not develop positively due to unfavorable circumstances. Claudia describes the community's reactions to the gossip about Pecola: "They were disgusted, amused, shocked, outraged, or even excited by the story. But we listened for the one who would say, "Poor little girl," or, "Poor baby," but there was only head-wagging where these words should have been" (Morrison 2007: 190). Despite their young age, Claudia and Frieda notice the community's absence of concern and compassion for Pecola.

Narrating the story from an adult perspective, Claudia gains a wiser insight into Pecola's tragedy. Regarding this, Surányi succinctly explains: "The adult Claudia possesses information of which earlier she was ignorant. In a revelatory moment she realized that the whole community was guilty of the internalization of self-hatred and the related scapegoating of Pecola" (2007: 16). The grown-up Claudia comprehends that the community used Pecola as a scapegoat for their personal feelings of inadequacy and racial self-loathing. They saw in Pecola everything they did not want to be, and by debasing and gossiping about her, they felt superior and self-important. According to Rebecca Degler, the community needed Pecola: "After all is said and done, the novel's main narrator, Claudia, sadly notes the way her community confiscated Pecola's identity in order to give themselves one" (2006: 233). The community needed someone inferior to compare themselves to in order to boost their confidence. However, in the process of scapegoating Pecola, they contributed to the total annihilation of her identity. Pecola, being quiet and absorbing their internalized racism, did nothing to contradict them. When it comes to culprits for Pecola's hopeless situation, Julia Eichelberger adds to the discussion: "Therefore (and this is a crucial step) all of us are equally guilty; Claudia was just as responsible for Pecola's misery as Cholly" (1999: 68). According to Eichelberger's interpretation, Claudia, Cholly, and all other members of the community are equally guilty of abandoning Pecola and not providing her with support, care, and self-worth, but instead, by leaving her on her own they helped deepen Pecola's trauma to the most extreme level. Still, it is disputable whether Claudia and Cholly should be considered equally responsible since, as Trudier Harris notes, "[…] Claudia and her family have at least tried to care" (1991: 51). McTeers did show care by taking Pecola in, worrying about her well-being, and by the children's innocent attempt to save Pecola.

Another critical difference between Pecola and Claudia and one of the crucial aspects of Claudia's identity quest is her wish and necessity to tell the story. Philip Page explains the importance of storytelling with regard to successful identity formation: "Beset with the inversions, displacements, and fragmentations of a racialized society, Morrison's characters have few viable options for developing fulfilled identities. One such option, however, is storytelling" (1995: 178). Claudia tells Pecola's story, but even more importantly, she tells the story of the black community and the insurmountable problems it deals with when it comes to its racial identity. By storytelling, Claudia becomes wiser on her path to self-discovery, by comprehending and making sense of the unspeakable story – Pecola's tragedy.

Claudia's character shows that despite poverty, racism, gender discrimination, and unsupportive community, a black female child might be able to reject the beauty standards imposed by the white ideology with the help of a loving and supportive family. Claudia and Frieda show that having a caring mother, a protective father, and a strong sisters' bond makes a significant difference. In addition to this, Claudia's identity development is primarily influenced by Pecola's story. Lynne Tirrell remarks on the importance of storytelling: "[…] Claudia MacTeer shows us the importance of listening carefully to the stories of others and learning to tell one's own story" (1997: 22). Claudia learns valuable lessons by noting Pecola's inferiority complex, her inability to tell her own story and the community's negative attitudes that reflect the internalized racism they feel. She uses the knowledge she gains to tell her own story, which proves to be of vital importance in her identity formation process.

3.3.4 Geraldine

Geraldine, a light-skinned black woman, considers herself superior to other black people because of her light skin and favorable economic and financial situation. Denise Heinze comments on the belief of light-skinned people that they are superior: "Those blacks who are

light-skinned often assume, or are perceived to assume, a superiority based solely on the relative absence of melanin from their skin…" (1993: 18). The interracial racism that Geraldine exemplifies stems from the relative social construct, the color of the skin. Heinze further notices: "Morrison spares no feelings; she feels no compunction, to mitigate her belief that the valorization of light-skinned beauty is the most disturbing and prevalent form of colorism and thus functions as one of the greatest barriers to the spiritual and psychic health of the black community" (1993: 21). By portraying Geraldine and Maureen, Morrison shows the profound and damaging consequences that valuing the light skin more than darker skin has when it comes to the identity formation of young girls. Not only is Pecola discriminated against by the white people, but by the members of her own race as well. These forms of internalized racism teach young girls that the color and the exact shade of the color of the skin are of utmost importance. Since Geraldine considers her family to be higher-ranking than other families, she does not allow her son to play with black children, teaching him that he should judge people according to the color of their skin and not their character and personality. Geraldine takes excellent care of her son, but her cold demeanor deprives him of love and attention. Geraldine seems to only feel love for her cat, a black cat with blue eyes. Geraldine's son Junior lures Pecola into their house and kills the cat, jealous that the cat possesses his mother's love and care more than he does. Junior accuses Pecola of killing the cat, and Geraldine immediately believes his words, failing to realize how desperate her son is for his mother's attention. She verbally abuses Pecola by insulting and humiliating her: ""Get out," she said, her voice quiet. "You nasty little black bitch. Get out of my house"" (Morrison 2007: 92). Geraldine's language is colored by racism and hatred. Pecola reminded Geraldine of everything that she hated and everything that she resisted becoming. Licille P. Fultz provides a comprehensive explanation of Geraldine's verbal outburst: "It is evident from her unprovoked verbal flailing at Pecola that Geraldine is reacting to something deep within herself – repressed anger and frustration prompted by racism that compel her to suffer overtly as a black woman while she exists internally as a white woman" (2010: 91). In the same way as Pecola does, Geraldine suffers from an inferiority complex, but unlike Pecola, she has lighter skin and better social position that make her feel closer to the white ideology. Still, she is not white, and thus displays racial self-loathing and internalized racism by negating her black identity.

It is noteworthy to mention that Geraldine is also a victim of the dominant system. The negation of her racial identity, internalized racism that she adopts, and her desire to belong to and be considered a member of the superior class all show the impact and power of white ideology in society. The development of Geraldine's identity is threatened by her insecurity and inability to belong to the white culture that she wishes to be a part of.

The elaboration regarding the differences among the members of the black race that Geraldine's gives to her son best exemplifies her racial self-hatred: "She had explained to him the difference between colored people and niggers. They were easily identifiable. Colored people were neat and quiet; niggers were dirty and loud" (Morrison 2007: 87). Even though Geraldine herself is black, she uses the derogatory word "Negro" to relate to certain people who belong to the same race as she does. Instead of accepting her racial identity, Geraldine transfers her negative feelings about it to Pecola, a powerless young girl, and this process makes Geraldine feel powerful and superior.

Characters such as Pauline and Geraldine show that negating racial identity and striving for white ideology is present not only among children but also among adults. They are the ones who set bad examples for their children to follow, thus affecting their identity formation negatively.

3.3.5 The three prostitutes

The three prostitutes, China, Poland, and Miss Marie, are the Breedloves' neighbors and, apart from Claudia, the only friendly and caring people in Pecola's life.

Morrison displays the characters of three prostitutes in an ironic way to denote, once again, that one should not judge and evaluate people's character based on superficial factors such as race, gender, age, job, etc. The three prostitutes are very kind to Pecola, giving her the attention and affection that she does not receive at home. Unlike her family and friends, the three prostitutes give Pecola nicknames, worry about where her socks are, talk to her and make her laugh. Pecola loves spending time with them; their house is always filled with laughter and singing. Denise Heinze recognizes the irony Morrison uses in the portrayal of the three prostitutes: "Morrison's denunciation of the society that Pecola lives in becomes even more pronounced by virtue of the fact that the only place Pecola feels a sense of warmth and humanity is in an establishment that sells love for profit" (1993: 78). In the whole black community, the three prostitutes seem to be the only ones who are not interested in the societal hierarchies and white ideology and who see Pecola past these superficially constructed concepts.

Furthermore, apart from not perceiving Pecola through the white gaze, the three prostitutes seem generally unconcerned about the white standards of beauty. According to Gurleen Grewal, "Besides Claudia, who unlearns her way into an enabling selfhood, the only characters in the novel who do not look at themselves through the eyes of others are the three whores" (1998: 37). They do not seem to pay attention to the white standards which could be related to their profession, as their job makes them feel desirable and attractive.

Elliott Butler-Evans points to another critical perspective regarding the three prostitutes: "The prostitutes embody women's independence and empowerment…" (1989: 70). The three women do not depend on anyone; they are financially stable and able to provide for themselves. Additionally, their self-confidence and the absence of the impact of white culture positively affect their identity formation.

When comparing other characters in the novel to the three prostitutes, Gurleen Grewal pinpoints: "The three uneducated whores shunned by the town's respectable folk are presented more favorably than the educated Geraldine and Soaphead Church, whose complicity earns authorial contempt even as it requires our understanding" (1998: 5). Unlike Geraldine and Soaphead Church who are considered superior as they occupy a higher position in society based on their lighter skin and better financial status, the three prostitutes, even though scorned by the community, seem to be in possession of better characteristic traits. They are kind, confident, and loving. They support each other and do not let outside influences in the forms of the community or the white gaze affect them. Similarly to Pecola, the three prostitutes also suffer discriminatory practices because of their race, gender, and profession. However, unlike Pecola, they do not let these practices affect them by supporting each other and finding comfort in their friendship. In this way, friendship proves to be one of the crucial factors in identity development. When it comes to Pecola, her friends abandoned her after her traumatic experience, leaving her completely alone, which additionally contributed to her already fragile state of mind.

3.3.6 Maureen Peal

Maureen Peal is Pecola, Claudia, and Frieda's classmate. She stands out from the girls as she is a light-skinned, wealthy, and self-confident black girl. Maureen's superiority is evident

in her higher social and economic position, but also in the lighter color of her skin, which is preferable in society and considered aristocratic compared to darker black skin. Pecola, Claudia, and Frieda observed Maureen admiring her clothes and her superior position in their school and among other classmates.

Pecola, Claudia, and Frieda were very well aware of the special treatment that Maureen received from everyone around them:

> She enchanted the entire school. When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls; white boys didn't stone her, white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls' toilet, and their eyes genuflected under sliding lids" (Morrison 2007: 62).

This passage reveals many details regarding school life in the 1940s. Evidently, school life was primarily influenced by racism as the color of the students' skin did not only determine the relationship among the students but also the teachers' attitudes toward students, which goes against school policies, as certain students should not receive special treatment. Racism present at schools can be very detrimental to students' identity development as students are taught from an early age that specific color and shade of skin make an individual more likable. In this way, the children might develop internalized racism wishing to change their physical appearance in order to be liked by their teachers and classmates. The consequences of adopting internalized racism at such a young age are illustrated in the character of Pecola.

The irony is also evident in Maureen's family, as they have become wealthy by filing lawsuits based on racism, thus acquiring wealth and rising above the black people who struggle financially and who probably experience racism on a much higher level, something that Linden Peach described as "a perverse parody of the real struggles for civil rights" (1995: 33). Maureen's family makes a profit on what are known to be significant problems for black people, even though it is evident through Maureen's characterization that she appears very privileged in the community and that she is not discriminated against. She is considered beautiful and superior to other black people by members of both black and white people.

The young children's awareness of societal hierarchies along the racial and class lines is also evident in Maureen's self-confidence and firm belief in her superiority. This entitles her to an extensive choice of friends, as white and black boys and girls want to be in her company. After a brief acquaintance with Pecola, Maureen joins the classmates in verbal abuse of Pecola by saying: "I *am* cute! And you ugly! Black and ugly black e mos. I *am* cute!" (Morrison 2007: 73). This instance of peer violence shows that dominant white ideology is present in society to that extent that children from the youngest age develop self-consciousness regarding their physical appearance and learn that beauty standards are associated with the color of the skin and financial status.

3.4 Themes that form problematic narratives surrounding female identity

3.4.1 White gaze, internalized racism

Although the novel is centered around black people's experiences and white characters are not depicted, the novel resonates with the white presence, thus illustrating the powerful influence that the white culture exerts over black people. Morrison shows that the question of female identity is tightly connected to white ideology, as black people cannot avoid the

predominantly white society around them. Melvina Johnson Young skillfully observes the main issue when it comes to black people's perception of themselves: "In essence Black people are possessed of two consciousness, two gazes, one Black and one white, and are then capable of seeing themselves and judging themselves as white people would" (1993: 62). Black people are aware of two perceptions of themselves: black and white, and this "double-consciousness" (Du Bois 2007: 8) drastically affects their identity development. The question of identity formation is further made complicated for women, as they are influenced by beauty standards that both white and black people limit to white women only. The white race imposes whiteness as the standard of beauty, but both races accept it. David E. Magill highlights the arbitrariness of placing white beauty standards on a pedestal: "As a system of power, whiteness uses skin color as a means for legitimizing certain ideals as normative, thereby defining nonwhite as marginal. It produces notions of unequal difference based on arbitrarily chosen characteristics" (2003: 373). Basing beauty standards on skin color is a very superficial choice, as race is a social construct and does not decide how attractive or unattractive someone is. Magill correctly concludes that this arbitrary, superficial choice is related to the power system, as the decision on who is beautiful and who is not is based on the position in a social hierarchy.

The Bluest Eye shows the impossibility of black people to escape the white gaze and white ideology. Still, it also exemplifies different ways in which black women can fight them and possibly eliminate them. Regarding the inevitability of white presence in black people's lives, Linden Peach insightfully comments:

> Within the ironic interplay of difference, the text dramatises and explores the consequences of enforced or voluntary abatement to white society, though in a sense no abatement can be entirely voluntary where black people exist in a world defined by the surrounding white society in terms of its blackness (1995: 30).

Black people cannot escape the fact that they live in a white society as they were forcefully moved and integrated into a predominantly white population. However, despite this forced white environment, many members of the black population voluntarily accept the white standards and even try to assimilate into them. For instance, Pauline neglects her family in order to please the white family she works for; Geraldine teaches her son wrong lessons about friendship and judging people's character; Pecola desperately wishes to possess blue eyes; all these characters are unhappy and develop an inferiority complex and racial self-loathing dreaming the impossible dreams and hoping for the unattainable goals – to be as similar to white people as possible.

Closely related to the white gaze is the concept of beauty standards and what society considers beautiful. Patrick Bryce Bjork explains why physical appearance has been of vital importance for black people:

> Within the socio-historical context of black oppression, appearances have always been tantamount to gaining approval from the dominant group, however illusionary those appearances or approvals may be. Consequently, those who are able to mimic white social codes may hope to move socially and economically in both the black and white worlds, and thus, color serves to determine class order (1994: 39).

As illustrated in the novel, white people evaluate and judge other people based on the color of their skin. The color and the exact shade of black color determine the social position and the level of acceptance and likeability within the society. Therefore, characters such as Geraldine and Maureen Peal, with lighter skin and substantial financial means, are considered to occupy a higher social position.

Additionally, Farah Jasmine Griffin insightfully describes the importance of beauty concepts for black women:

> The terms "precious," "pure," "innocent," "beautiful," and "revere" were (and in many instances, continue to be) particularly important to African American women. Each of these terms has been equated with white womanhood and thereby with femininity – both privileged spheres in our society; spheres where black women have historically been denied access" (2001: 215).

The concepts of beauty and femininity were long denied to black women; due to the long history of slavery and black women's oppressed position, they were deprived of the possibility to feel like ladies and embrace their womanhood. Even after the slavery was abolished, the trend of not observing black women as beautiful continued due to their inferior position in society and the menial jobs they performed.

The hierarchy of beauty based on racism has had devastating consequences on black women's psyche. The most severe one is self-hatred due to aesthetics and accepted beauty standards. Exploring those affected by the beauty standards, Barbara Christian concludes: "All of the adults in the book, in varying degrees, are affected by their acceptance of the society's inversion of the natural order. For in internalizing the West's standards of beauty, the black community automatically disqualifies itself as the possessor of its own cultural standards" (1985: 52). Some of the female characters seem to be greatly concerned with beauty standards, such as Pauline, who obsessively watches movies with white actresses and shows love and care towards her employers' white daughter; and Geraldine who refuses to socialize with black people even though she herself is black. On the other hand, characters like Mrs. McTeer do not display a high level of appreciation for beauty standards. Still, they appear to appreciate them and consider white people superior, as Mrs. McTeer buys white dolls for her children and possesses Shirley Temple cups in her house.

When it comes to the impact of the dominant ideology, Griffin asserts that it affects black women much more than men: "Because black women were always compared to "the white woman" – the standard bearer – in the eyes of mainstream society and in the eyes of far too many black men, they fell short of this ideal" (2001: 220). Therefore, it is understandable that white standards influence women to a greater degree, as they are judged not only by the members of the white race but by the members of the black race as well.

Taking the Breedlove family as an example, the community considers them ugly and they accept it without a contradiction. Barbara Christian offers her view on the subject, saying that the Breedloves started acting in accordance with their "ugly" physical appearance: "As people come to believe that they *are* their appearance, they behave more and more as society expects them to. So the Breedloves fight and destroy each other in their ugly storefront because they come to believe in their own ugliness, their intrinsic unworthiness" (1985: 52). In the society the Breedloves live in, the way that people look is associated with the way they should behave; as the family is considered ugly, the overall community expects them to be poor, violent, dysfunctional, and eventually the family fulfills their expectations, convinced that they are indeed ugly. Regarding the community's reasons for considering the family ugly, Robert Samuels provides a thorough explanation: "Since these black subjects cannot gain a sense of

beauty from the dominant culture that celebrates only whiteness, their beauty is derived from debasing other people in their own community" (2001: 108). The community sees the Breedloves as ugly and, in this way, uses them as scapegoats in order to consider themselves superior and beautiful. Samuels adds to the discussion: "Moreover, by showing that Pecola's ugliness and weakness made everyone else feel beautiful and strong, Morrison displays how the idealization of the self is dependent on a devalorization of a debased Other" (2001: 108). It can be concluded that the community needs to degrade the Breedloves as this is the only way that they would feel important and worthy. This is best illustrated by the character of Geraldine, who insults a powerless child in order to fight her racial self-loathing and feel superior.

Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar refer to the negative influences that teach young girls of the bad image they are expected to look up to: "Of course, from the eighteenth century on, conduct books for ladies had proliferated, enjoining young girls to submissiveness, modesty, self-lessness; reminding all women that they should be angelic" (2000: 23). Depiction of women in mythology and fairy tales that young girls are exposed to while growing up, teaches them that good characters are always beautiful princesses while mean villains are ugly. These stories negatively affect girls as girls' lives are often presented as dependent on a man, on a prince who comes to rescue them and who is a necessary asset to achieving a happily ever after. Morrison depicts the dangers of exposure to such objects of the dominant culture in *The Bluest Eye* by showing their detrimental consequences on the female psyche.

When it comes to infiltrating the white culture into the black community, Morrison uses elements of popular culture to show the omnipresence of popular opinion. The white influence is presented in many white Hollywood movie stars that are mentioned, such as Shirley Temple, Joan Harlow, and Ginger Rogers. Pauline and Pecola idolize them to the extent that Pauline's only source of happiness is watching movies with white actresses, and Pecola cannot stop drinking milk from a Shirley Temple cup. Aoi Mori emphasizes the power that elements of popular culture have over black people: "The greatest damage of white capitalism is that the images produced by the commodity culture manipulate both the behavior and mentality of African Americans, as stereotypes do" (1999: 37). The constant exposure to white culture influences black people's identity development as black people begin striving for the white ideals, wishing to change themselves. Additionally, they adopt the white mentality in judging other black people, as evident in the community's ostracism of Pecola.

Another element of the dominant culture that shows the prevalence of white ideology is the black children's desire to possess the perfect white, blue-eyed doll. Laurie Vickroy adds to the discussion on the possession of dolls: "Significantly, dolls are important transitional objects in children's development as well as ways culture is inculcated through the family" (2002: 42). In addition to the attractiveness of white dolls, Vickroy emphasizes the family's influence on children when it comes to the interpretation of the white culture. Unlike Pecola's mother, who idolizes everything related to the white culture, Claudia and Frieda's parents do buy white dolls for their daughters, but they simultaneously equip their children with feelings of self-worth and self-confidence.

Pecola's obsession with the Mary Jane candies that show the image of a white girl demonstrates the level of Pecola's infatuation with the dominant culture. Mr. Yacobowski, the man who sells the candies to Pecola, looks down on her and discriminates against her when she wishes to pay for the candies, "She holds the money toward him. He hesitates, not wanting to touch her hand" (Morrison 2007: 49). Mr. Yacobowski's white male gaze sees Pecola as inferior simply because she is black and he is white, even though he himself is the immigrant in the USA and occupies a lower social position in comparison to American citizens. Mr. Yacobowski's behavior reveals that black people occupied the absolute bottom of society. Morrison, in this way, displays irony; while the inferior societal categories should stick together and support each other, they all discriminate against one another and strive for unattainable

ideals of the white ideology. Judylyn S. Ryan analyzes Mr. Yacobowski's perception: "Yet, as Morrison explores his gaze, she also explores its deficiency. Mr. Yacobowski's blindness, his inability to "see" Pecola, points to both the hegemony and the weakened state of the male White gaze. It is both debilitating *and* debilitated" (2007: 154). Mr. Yacobowski's inability to perceive Pecola's personality as he focuses only on the color of her skin testifies to his superficiality and, therefore, the superficiality of all those who adopt the white gaze when perceiving and judging people. Consequently, Pecola notices this instance of racism and further deepens her desire for blue eyes.

When discussing elements of popular culture that black characters are exposed to, it is necessary to mention the Dick-and-Jane story that repeats throughout the novel and that the children used to learn how to read in schools. This story is also a sign of the "white gaze," as it represents how white people see the perfect family, thus reflecting how black families differ from the white standard. Linden Peach makes a comparison emphasizing the main differences between the black and white world: "The order of the white world, its coherence and moral certainty, is juxtaposed throughout with the disunity and search for coherence in the lives of the African-Americans" (1995: 35). The perfect white family is juxtaposed with the chaos and disorganized world of the Breedloves; the novel gives an impression that the white world is perfect and carefree in the same way that the Dick-and-Jane story is, while the black world is disorderly. However, as the story progresses and becomes more and more incoherent, Morrison suggests that the white world and white families are not as flawless and exemplary as they seem. According to Pin-chia Feng: "In *The Bluest Eye* Morrison both portrays the attractiveness of the Dick-and-Jane narrative to the black community and deconstructs element by element the false ideology of this white, middle-class discourse" (1998: 53). Although the black population longs for what seems to be the ideal white family, the novel suggests that not everything is the way that it looks like when it is observed from the outsiders' perspectives. One of the examples is Geraldine's family, which appears to be superior along the racial, social, and economic lines, but reveals the troublesome familial relations and feelings of racial self-loathing and insecurity.

The reason why Morrison includes so many elements of popular culture is that she wants to highlight the pressure that the white ideology imposes on the black population and to demonstrate why black people find it hard to resist the accepted beauty standards. Morrison explains where the Breedloves' conviction that they are ugly comes from:

> 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 (2007: 39).

The community and the environment surrounding them convinced the Breedloves that they were ugly. This had the most powerful influence on Pecola, the family's youngest and most psychologically fragile member. What made Pecola's psychological decline even worse was the total lack of family support and their conviction in the family's ugliness.

Madonne M. Miner draws attention to the importance of the mother figure and the "mother's gaze" in the child's path toward self-individuation: "As various psychologists attest, the mother's gaze is of primary importance in generating a child's sense of self. Tragically, Pauline looks at her infant daughter and then looks away" (2005: 18). When Pauline gave birth to Pecola, she adopted the white gaze when perceiving her newborn baby, proclaiming her ugly and therefore unworthy of love and attention. Pauline's behavior toward Pecola made her

vulnerable to the white gaze and easily susceptible to white ideology. Pauline's attitude could be justified by mentioning the white gaze of the doctor who was present while she was delivering the baby and who degraded her by comparing her to an animal: "When he got to me he said now these here women you don't have any trouble with. They deliver right away and with no pain. Just like horses" (Morrison 2007: 124). The doctor's harsh words made the difficult task of childbirth even more unpleasant for Pauline.

On the other hand, Pecola's father's identity development has also been threatened by the white gaze. White people observed his first sexual encounter, and young, powerless Cholly, transferred his anger and frustration from the white people to the girl, who was equally humiliated and traumatized by the experience. Morrison describes his understanding of the futility of blaming the white hunters when he could do nothing to retaliate: "His subconscious knew what his conscious mind did not guess – that hating them would have consumed him, burned him up like a piece of soft coal, leaving only flakes of ash and a question mark of smoke" (2007: 150). Cholly found it easier to hate Darlene, the only person who was inferior to him in the embarrassing traumatizing situation. However, Cholly continued transferring the negative emotions stemming from his lower social position and racist, discriminatory practices to women in his life. This is evident in the psychological and physical abuse that he imposes on his wife and daughter. It can be said that Cholly Breedlove is metaphorically raped by the white gaze, as Johnnie M. Stover remarks: "This emasculation, with its accompanying destruction of Cholly's ability to love, is instrumental in his rape of Pecola" (2003: 15). Cholly experienced the loss of his mother, his father abandoned him, and the white people breached his privacy in one of the most defining moments of a young boy's life, thus threatening his identity and his ability to love and care for his family. The extent to which the white point of view dominated Cholly's life is evidenced in his belief that God is white: "God was a nice old white man, with long white hair, flowing white beard, and little blue eyes that looked sad when people died and mean when they were bad" (Morrison 2007: 134). In Cholly's view, God's physical appearance adhered to all the white beauty standards.

When it comes to the parents' detrimental effect on their children's identity development, Denise Heinze shrewdly observes:

> Cholly's act and Pauline's obsession with beauty represent a failure of a man and woman, a marriage, a community, and a society. The novel is an indictment of twisted values and tangled lives, and is Morrison's most blatant and harrowing testimony to the impossibility of love in a world that values looks at the expense of humanity (1993: 29).

Both Cholly and Pauline allow the white gaze to interfere with their lives, and Pauline adopts the white gaze herself not only in the perception of herself but also in the perception of her daughter. In this way, the parents fail to teach Pecola about self-love. Instead, they teach her racial self-loathing and striving for white ideals. Observing the Breedloves as the family, Timothy B. Powell notes: "By looking at themselves through the eyes of a white culture, the Breedlove family lose all notion of their own black identity" (1997: 50). Due to the annihilation of their familial identity, Pecola's personal identity formation was fraught with difficulties from the beginning of her life, as she was immediately exposed to both the white gaze and internalized racism by the members of her family.

As a result of the devastating white gaze imposed on her by the members of both races, Pecola wishes to get blue eyes, hoping that in this way her perception of the world will change, but also the way that people look at her. She wishes to change the gaze of others. It is noteworthy to observe that Pecola wishes for blue eyes and not white skin or blonde hair, which

are also elements of the idealized white physical appearance. It can be concluded that Pecola desires the blue eyes as they are related to the perception, the way that she is looked at. Eyes are the central metaphor symbolizing the gaze. Timothy B. Powell further explains the metaphorical meaning of "the bluest eye": "And yet one is always aware in *The Bluest Eye* of the haunting presence of that singular (white) eye of the title, the view from the center which keeps these black characters feeling as though they have been consigned to live on "the hem of life"" (1997: 49). Pecola strives to possess the bluest eyes, and with them the white gaze which would enable her to feel beautiful and more importantly, which would make others see her as beautiful. She needs validation from the community, otherwise, she feels self-conscious and ugly.

The event that triggers the illusion that Pecola magically obtained the blue eyes is her father's rape of her. Lynn Orilla Scott mentions that rape was not the only cause of Pecola's insanity: "Metaphorically speaking, Pecola has been raped by "whiteness," long before her father enters her" (2006: 89). It is the combination of two traumatic experiences, racial discrimination and physical abuse that drive Pecola to insanity, which results in believing that she actually possesses the blue eyes that everyone is jealous of, and talking to her imaginary friend. Madonne M. Miner explains that Pecola's insanity is the result of the white gaze adopted by both white and black people in Pecola's life: "As these eyes do not see her, or see her only as a sign of something other, Pecola loses sight of herself" (2005: 17). After Cholly's rape of Pecola, the overall community starts gossiping about her and stops paying attention to her, resulting in Pecola's need to create someone in her imagination who would converse with her. Pecola's madness shows the repercussions of the unsupportive community that could have helped her and changed the course of her life.

Another consequence of adopting the white gaze and internalized racism worthy of critical attention is the feeling of shame that stems from them. For the black population, "…dark skin functions as a marker of shame, a sign of a stigmatized racial identity" (Bouson 2000: 32). The feeling of shame that black people feel comes from the insecurity they feel regarding their racial identity and the white ideology that promotes white skin as superior. Therefore, the feeling of shame results in both the rejection of black traditions and the admiration of white standards. According to K. Zauditu-Selassie, "If not deflected, the gaze creates shame and ultimately the dissolution of the personality" (2009: 43). Cultural shame that the characters feel due to generalized stereotypes and prejudices has a profound impact on individual identity, family structure, and collective group identity. The shame can also have an intergenerational effect, as it can be transferred from parents to children, as evidenced by Pauline's shame that Pecola inherits. J. Brooks Bouson adds to the discussion by revealing one of the possibilities of how to discard the feeling of shame: "And in the response of members of the African-American community, who end up collectively scapegoating Pecola, the novel reveals how humiliated individuals can temporarily rid themselves of their shame by humiliating others" (2000: 25). The community uses Pecola to transfer the self-contempt they feel about their racial identity, to feel more superior and thus suppress their own feeling of shame.

3.4.2 Community

It has already been mentioned in the previous chapter that the community is of paramount importance for black people due to the very challenging historical and social circumstances they live in. Morrison extensively talked about the significance of the community, saying that the community would take care of one another in difficult times, which both meant to support and care for its members but also be strict, as they wanted the best for

members of their community ("Intimate Things in Place" 1994: 11). However, Morrison insists that the black community had their best interests at heart: "And when they punished us or hollered at us, it was, at the time, we thought, so inhibiting and so cruel, and it's only much later that you realize that they were interested in you. Interested in you – they cared about your behavior" (Morrison 1994: 11). In *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison mirrors these communal characteristics in McTeers generous act, that best illustrates the care and interest in wellbeing of the member of their community. When Cholly burnt down their house, McTeers took Pecola in, even though they themselves were not in the ideal financial situation, as evidenced by Claudia's mother complaining that Pecola drank too much milk.

However, outside of this solitary example, the black community in *The Bluest Eye* failed their tradition in many respects. Firstly, they did not take over the role of othermothers when Pecola was neglected by her own mother. Instead, the community mentally abused Pecola by letting her know of their opinion that she was ugly. Secondly, once it was made public that Pecola experienced significant trauma, the community should have assisted her. According to Judith Herman, "Once it is publicly recognized that a person has been harmed, the community must take action to assign responsibility for the harm and to repair the injury. These two responses – recognition and restitution – are necessary to rebuild the survivor's sense of order and justice" (1992: 70). When the community found out about Pecola's rape and pregnancy, they did nothing to help her, but they even contributed to her traumatic experience, by gossiping about her. Therefore, they destroyed every possibility of aiding Pecola to overcome the trauma and develop a healthy identity. As Marc C. Conner correctly concludes: "Pecola is destroyed within her very community, and that community not only fails to aid her, they have helped cause her isolation" (2010: 76). The black community, driven by internalized racism, takes out their personal feelings of racial self-loathing and insecurity on the psychologically weakest person in their community, Pecola, who, isolated from everyone, slips into insanity.

It is noteworthy to emphasize that the community mistreated Pecola even before her father raped her. They discriminated against her due to her "ugliness." As Pecola's father sexually abused his daughter, the community has found another reason to prove their initial assumption – that Pecola is ugly, inferior, and unworthy. In this way, they take out their personal insecurities and negative feelings regarding their racial identity onto Pecola. J. Brooks Bouson addresses the community's actions: "Pecola, who absorbs the "waste" others dump on her, ultimately becomes the community scapegoat as members of the black community project onto her their own self-loathing and self-contempt – their own stain of blackness" (2000: 44). Acting in this way, the community feels superior and thus more important, beautiful and worthy, completely opposite to the qualities that they attribute to Pecola. Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber suggests that the community passes on to Pecola all these traits that they feel frightened of possessing: "The Breedloves take on the fears of their community – low self-esteem, shame, poverty, hopelessness, lack of love" (2001: 85). The community members observe Pecola and her family, and they conclude that they are ugly, poor, dysfunctional, and insecure. Additionally, the community members feel afraid that other people, superior to them, might see them in the same manner, so they take out on the Breedloves all these negative characteristics. Laurie Vickroy explains that the community does this as the Breedloves "…are merely extreme examples of the larger group's own abasement by white culture" (2002: 85).

On the other hand, Claudia and Frieda are examples of good community members and faithful friends who later realize that the community largely contributed to Pecola's downfall. The sisters planted the seeds hoping that the successful growth of marigolds would signify Pecola's giving birth to a healthy baby. However, Claudia realizes as an adult that none of the seeds planted that year grew. Harold Bloom describes the sisters' realization of the barren land in the community:

> Later, still obsessed by the failure of their marigolds, the sisters wished they had noticed that theirs were not the only marigolds failing to bloom; even in the gardens of the white-owned homes on the Lake Erie shores the marigolds had failed to bloom that year, suggesting that in Lorain, Ohio, in 1941, something was amiss in the community (2010: 29).

Morrison indicates that nature reflected the community's neglect and betrayal of Pecola. Since the community did nothing to help Pecola and allowed the total destruction of her identity formation, nature reciprocated by not allowing the land to be fertile. Finally, the black community could be accused of purposefully alienating themselves from the black culture and tradition by not helping Pecola. Melvin Dixon suggests: "*The Bluest Eye* is Morrison's study of a community out of touch with the land and the history that might have saved them" (2005: 25). By rejecting essential elements of their racial history, the community also rejects their past, and Dixon implies that Pecola's faith and the overall community's negative feelings regarding their racial identity could have been different if they had accepted their tradition.

3.4.3 Family and motherhood

Familial relations and especially motherhood seem to be the defining parameters in all the female characters' identity development. Erik H. Erikson provides an in-depth explanation regarding the importance of parents for a child's identity formation:

> We have already suggested that the infant's sense of trust is a reflection of parental faith; similarly, the sense of autonomy is a reflection of the parents' dignity as autonomous beings. For no matter what we do in detail, the child will primarily feel what it is we live by as loving, co-operative, and firm beings, and what makes us hateful, anxious, and divided in ourselves (1994:113)

Parents are the first and primary role models for their children; children look up to them and acquire their modes of behavior as they grow up. When it comes to black families, the role of parents is even more important as, according to RaShell R. Smith-Spears: "The black family, especially, has had to fight to maintain its stability in a society that is filled with racism, poverty, sexism, and fear" ("Family" 2006: 313). Observing the children in *The Bluest Eye*, it is evident that they are exposed to discriminatory practices, racism, poor financial conditions, the white gaze, internalized racism, etc., from an early age, and that parental support and guidance are crucial in children's identity development. Examples of children imitating their parents' modes of behavior are plentiful: Pecola develops an inferiority complex and strives for the white standards, just like Pauline; Cholly decides to run away and abandon Darlene when he thinks of the possibility that she might be pregnant, which reflects the same behavior as his father's; Sammy frequently runs away from home.

The negligence that her parents display irreparably damages Pecola. She grows up in a house where she witnesses domestic violence on a daily basis, where her father is an alcoholic, and her mother is neglectful of her children and family. The family's dysfunctionality is evidenced in the children's addressing their mother as Mrs. Breedlove, Sammy's participating in his parents' fights, and the absence of a brotherly/sisterly relationship. Even the surname Breedlove carries an ironic connotation, as children do not feel loved by their parents, and the family members do not show love toward one another. Pauline and Cholly were both mistreated by white people; Pauline with her negative childbirth experience and Cholly with white

people's observation of his first sexual encounter. After Cholly's unpleasant experience and after being humiliated and abandoned by everybody, including his father, he feels that he has nothing to lose and that he is free: "Dangerously free. Free to feel whatever he felt – fear, guilt, shame, love, grief, pity. Free to be tender or violent, to whistle or weep" (2007: 159). This ultimate freedom he felt allowed him to commit unforgivable sin against his daughter. As Denise Heinze comments: "When Cholly rapes Pecola he does so without any sense of right or wrong – a distinction he has never been taught or experienced" (1993: 74). As Cholly did not grow up in a traditional family and he had never learned natural familial relationships, he does not seem to be able to create a healthy and happy family yet alone understand the severity of the trauma he imposed upon his daughter. The core of Cholly's violent and abusive behavior could be found in his upbringing, as his parents abandoned him when he was a baby. This, together with his first sexual experience that was traumatic, influenced his becoming an aggressive person who was beating up his wife and who raped his daughter. Cholly redirects his frustration to others; he has no clear distinction between love and violence, and he has to take out his aggression on those weaker than him. Wilfred D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems made an association between Cholly's act and the season when he committed the rape: "Significantly, Cholly rapes Pecola in the section of the novel titled "Spring"; he above all remains incapable of providing the fertile, parental soil a child needs to grow and develop a positive sense of self" (1990: 14). Pecola is not given the foundation for identity formation by her parents, as she was denied love, care, support, security, which are central elements paving the children's way on the path toward individualization.

Discussing the Breedloves' inability to create a healthy environment for their children to grow up in, Harold Bloom states the possible reasons: "The Breedloves suffer from double rejections – from themselves, believing themselves to be ugly and therefore unworthy, and from the community" (2010: 62). The Breedloves are oppressed along many different lines, they are victimized by racism, discrimination, and ugliness. Additionally, they are oppressed by the white people, the black community, and by them themselves, by agreeing to and accepting all these forms of oppression.

When analyzing children's identity development, Erik H. Erikson places specific emphasis on the relationship between a mother and daughter: "What would we consider to be the earliest and most undifferentiated "sense of identity"? I would suggest that it arises out of the encounter of maternal person and small infant, an encounter which is one of mutual trustworthiness and mutual recognition" (1994: 105). The first moment when the child and mother meet is of crucial importance as they establish the mother/daughter bond; in the case of Pauline and Pecola, that moment is stained as Pauline sees her daughter as ugly and black, automatically passing on to Pecola these negative emotions. Pauline's poor motherhood skills persist throughout the novel. Morrison describes the very touching scene of Pecola's first menstruation when her mother is not there for her. Andrea O'Reilly emphasizes the significance of this moment: "Menstruation is the female rite of passage into womanhood, and it is usually the mother who guides her daughter through this passing" (2004: 56). Pecola and Pauline fail to establish the mother/daughter bond as they do not share these important moments. Pauline's poor motherhood skills are also demonstrated when she does not believe her daughter that she was raped. Laurie Vickroy offers the reasons for Pauline's behavior: "She illustrates how mothers, deprived of their own identities, become agents of culture, ideology, and personal history, and subsequently pass these interests on to their daughters" (2002: 40). Pauline herself has not developed a healthy sense of identity; she idealizes the white culture, perceives herself and her family as ugly; psychologically abuses her children; does not create a caring family environment; stays in an abusive marriage; therefore, it is evident that Pauline cannot be a positive role model for Pecola and cannot guide and help her in her individuation process.

Describing the importance of the mother figure for black children's identity formation, Andrea O'Reilly shrewdly observes:

> In a racist culture that deems black children inferior, unworthy, and unlovable, maternal love of black children is an act of resistance; in loving her children the mother instills in them a loved sense of self and high self-esteem, enabling them to defy and subvert racist discourses that naturalize racial inferiority and commodify blacks as other and object (2004: 11).

Regardless of race, mothers are central figures in guiding their children toward a healthy identity. However, regarding the black population, the mother's role is even more critical and more challenging to fulfill. Black children are exposed to constant discrimination with regard to race, class, and beauty standards, and the mother's job is to ensure that their children grow up without an inferiority complex, racial self-loathing, and insecurity.

Furthermore, the dreadful mistake that the Breedlove family makes is their acceptance and embrace of the community's opinion of them. Regarding this, Carmen Gillespie makes a valid comparison: "The contempt and exclusion they experience in the world becomes a template for their internal interactions. The family's exchanges consist almost entirely of verbal, physical, and ultimately sexual abuse" (2008: 48). Instead of challenging the popular opinion and serving as an example to their children to stand up to those who discriminate against them, the whole family adopts the white gaze, and start observing themselves through it.

One of the most devastating consequences of Pauline and Cholly's poor parental skills is the total absence of love in their household. Andrea O'Reilly pinpoints the importance of love for children: "Morrison argues that self-love depends on the self first being loved by another self. Before the child can love herself, she must experience herself being loved and learn that she is indeed valuable and deserving of affection" (2004: 33). Pecola never felt loved by her parents. Thus, she cannot love herself and accept herself for what she really is. Additionally, the relationship between her parents that she witnesses teaches her that love means violence and abuse. Unloved and uncared for, she constantly seeks approval and acceptance, hoping that the blue eyes will bring her the love that she lacks in her life. Pecola's family played a significant part in her perception of herself as ugly, which negatively contributed to the development of her identity. When it comes to Pauline and Cholly's inability to feel and show love for their children, Jean Wyatt makes an important observation: "And each character's way of loving is embedded in a historical context. Not only the character's personal past, but also the collective past of African Americans, shapes, or more likely warps, a character's form of loving" (2017: 13). The person's ability to love is influenced by a plethora of factors: their own family, upbringing, life conditions, together with historical and social circumstances. Analyzing Cholly's disturbing expressions of love, Wyatt adds: "[…] the U.S. social context of white supremacy, denigration of black masculinity, and mockery of black sexuality have shaped Cholly's chaotic and destructive form of loving" (2017: 13). Owing to the unfavorable circumstances in his life, Cholly has never learned to love himself, and thus he has never learned to love his children properly and healthily.

The Bluest Eye seems to suggest that the traditional nuclear family seems to be the unattainable goal for black families because such families are at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The novel is fraught with examples of emotional neglect of the children; Junior, Pecola, Sammy, and Cholly all lack parental love, care, and support, and therefore, due to their fragmented identities, they seem incapable of forming healthy relationships with other people. The novel further challenges the ideal of the family by comparing Pecola's family to the family

portrayed in the Dick-and-Jane story, emphasizing the inability of the Breedloves to reach this perfect ideal, mainly because of the racial difference – they could never become white.

Apart from the negative example of the Breedlove family, Morrison also depicts the McTeers, illustrating that happy and loving families are possible and present among black people. Mr. and Mrs. McTeer raise their daughters in a caring and protective manner, and the girls grow up to be self-confident, immune to the community's feelings of insecurity and racial self-loathing.

3.4.4 Men and violence

Although men occupy a peripheral position in the novel, they still considerably impact female characters' identity formation. Pecola's father, Cholly, fails as a patriarchal figure. Cholly is the victim of social and racial circumstances, and he proves to have a weak personality, displaying an inability to overcome the difficulties he has faced in his life. Cholly misplaces his hatred toward white men onto black women (Darlene, Pauline, Pecola). Cholly takes out his personal childhood traumas on his daughter, thus impeding her identity development. J. Brooks Bouson clarifies Cholly's transference of his traumas: "He does to her what has been done to him and thus, when he rapes Pecola, he inflicts on her his own feelings of exposure, powerlessness, narcissistic injury, and humiliation" (2000: 43). Cholly seems unaware of the fact that by physically raping Pecola he commits a similar crime, as he was metaphorically raped by the white gaze, when the white hunters insisted on observing his first sexual encounter. In the same way that the white people completely ruined such a critical threshold in a young person's life, he destroyed the same thing for his daughter, lowering down to the level of the white people that he so thoroughly despised. Cholly, so proud of his freedom that he believed he deserved after surviving traumatic experiences, does not realize that "such freedom carries with it the consequences of choice" (Otten 1989: 18), and the consequences of his choices wrecked the overall Breedlove family. Lisa Cade Wieland claims that Cholly commits the unforgivable crime: "As Morrison so aptly illustrates, one of the greatest crimes a person, society, or system can commit is to destroy a family" ("Family" 2003: 118). Inflicting physical, psychological, and sexual forms of abuse on the family members, Cholly annihilates the familial identity.

Another prominent male character that influences Pecola's identity development is Soaphead Church. Soaphead, himself very proud of his mixed blood and white ancestry, truly understands Pecola's desire for blue eyes. He uses her naivety to convince her that she does indeed get the bluest eyes and to murder the dog he hates. John N. Duvall discovers in Soaphead's letter the widespread striving of the black people "to forge an authentic identity for themselves" (2000: 36). Even though black people already have an authentic identity stemming from their tradition and customs, they still want to forge it, alter it so that it would resemble the white identity. When it comes to both Cholly's and Soaphead's actions in destroying Pecola's identity, Pin-chia Feng comments: "Both Soaphead and Cholly act out of oxymoronic feelings of sympathetic tenderness and destructive violence" (1998: 66). Soaphead feels sorry for Pecola, he treats her with kindness and understanding, while Pecola reminds Cholly of Pauline at the beginning of their romance, so both of their acts are triggered by positive emotions that seem to spiral out of control and end in aggression and destruction of Pecola.

Taking the black male experience into account, it seems important to focus on violence, as aggression is often associated with black men. Patricia Hill Collins sheds light on the historical perception of black men: "Historical representation of Black men as beasts have spawned a second set of images of that center on Black male bodies, namely, Black men as inherently violent, hyperheterosexual, and in need of discipline" (2004: 158). Due to their

powerful, muscular physique, together with wrong perceptions of black men originating from the period of slavery, it is widely believed by white people that black men are violent rapists. In this regard, Cholly becomes the cliché character, as he fulfills expectations of white people when it comes to their imaginations of how a black man behaves.

Morrison depicts many instances of violence in *The Bluest Eye*, but particular emphasis is placed on the violence the children suffer. Laurie Vickroy clarifies how violence impacts children: "Children are particularly vulnerable to abuse because it effects the way they develop, as well as their life coping skills and their future relationships" (2002: 14). As Pecola witnesses violence on a daily basis, she learns to live with it as a natural part of life, which is why she does nothing when she experiences abuse later on in her life – by her classmates, Soaphead, Geraldine, and even her parents. Vickroy further elaborates on the matter: "Unlike adults, they can suffer regression, misperceptions of time, pessimism about the future, disrupted attachments, and impaired social skills and cognitive development" (2002: 14). Due to both physical and psychological abuse, Pecola suffers significant consequences: she develops an inferiority complex, she lacks basic social skills as she is unable to start and maintain friendships, and she slips into an altered state of mind having hallucinations and idealizing present conditions.

Attempting to understand why men resort to violence, Carol Gilligan and David A.J. Richards offer their view on the subject: "…the shaming of manhood leads to violence – how in some instances it makes violence inescapable because for some men violence is the only way of undoing shame and restoring honor. Overpowering another is a way in which one can assert or reclaim one's superiority" (2018: 6). This explanation can be applied to black men, as they have suffered through an extended period of oppression. One of the results of such oppression is the loss of masculinity, as they were often forced to endure physical and psychological torture and to witness the women from their community being abused while they could do nothing to protect them. Therefore, they would resort to violence to prove to themselves that they were still masculine, powerful, and superior. This is probably the reason why the readers sympathize with Cholly. According to Julie Cary Nerad, "Morrison places her characters within contexts that explain, if they do not excuse, each character's complex actions. Cholly Breedlove, warped as a young teen by white racism, is certainly not a hero; however, many readers ultimately feel some compassion for him despite his heinous act" ("Toni Morrison" 2006: 638). Morrison portrays Cholly as a victim of racial and social circumstances, so the readers feel empathy toward him and can find justification for him violating his daughter. Lynn Orilla Scott even goes so far as to equal the level of victimization for Pecola and Cholly by claiming, "Morrison uses the incest story not to indict patriarchy, but to expose a system of racial othering in which the father is as much a victim as the daughter" (2006: 87). Pecola and Cholly might both be considered victims of the society they lived in, under the constant scrutiny of the white gaze and imposition of white standards. Additionally, as the rape scene was depicted from the rapist's point of view, readers get insight into Cholly's thoughts, which, as deranged as they were, were still infused with love: "He wanted to break her neck – but tenderly" (Morrison 2017: 161). Pecola reminded him of Pauline when he first met her and fell in love with her, and the freedom he felt he possessed corresponded to indifference regarding the consequences of his terrible act.

Discussing incest as the most dramatic and traumatic experience Pecola suffers through, Lynn Orilla Scott makes an insightful observation: "Morrison ironically suggests that Cholly's incestuous act is the one affirmation of her blackness that Pecola experiences. Incest, in this novel, thus both reinforces and exposes the taboo of blackness" (2010: 100). As harrowing as this experience was, it was the only act of love that Pecola had ever received from her parents and the only confirmation that black is beautiful, too.

Another instance of violence that affects Pauline's and Pecola's identity development is domestic violence that Pauline is a victim of and Pecola witnesses. Morrison describes Pecola's feelings during the moments when her parents are engaged in physical and verbal conflicts: "She struggled between an overwhelming desire that one would kill the other, and a profound wish that she herself would die" (2007: 43). Pauline and Cholly do not seem to comprehend the impact that domestic violence has on their children, as both Sammy and Pecola turn into unlovable children who suffer severe traumas from the dysfunctional family environment. Not only do Pauline and Cholly traumatize their children by making them witness their fights, but they also serve as wrong role models in teaching them about family values. When it comes to Cholly and Pauline's reasons for fighting, it is evident that they carry out their frustrations on each other as they cannot fight those they are really frustrated with – the white system they live in. As Jan Furman correctly observes: "In turning on Pauline, Cholly fights whom he can and not whom he should" (1999: 223). Cholly's physical abuse of Pauline, sexual harassment of Pecola, and psychological torture of the whole family can be attributed to the "brutal system of dehumanization" (Butler-Evans 1989: 78). The white ideology that discriminates against black people provokes violence which sometimes has devastating and even fatal consequences.

Apart from domestic violence, Pecola is also exposed to peer violence. The boys at school who bully Pecola are also black, yet they call her black and ugly. Morrison mentions the senselessness of the nature of their insults: "They had extemporized a verse made up of two insults about matters over which the victim had no control: the color of her skin and speculations on the sleeping habits of an adult, wildly fitting in its incoherence" (2007: 65). The insults that they direct toward Pecola are the ones that could be used against them, too. Perhaps due to their own insecurities regarding their racial identity, they treat Pecola the way they do. Morrison explicitly states:

> They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds – cooled – and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was in its path (2007: 65)

By illustrating examples of peer violence, Morrison shows how internalized racism affects children negatively, as they bully and abuse those they consider inferior along the racial and social lines. Additionally, Morrison emphasizes, through the portrayal of Junior, that children learn about the adoption of the white gaze and internalized racism from their parents, who in this way serve as very negative role models, instilling racial self-loathing and discriminatory practices into their offspring from an early age.

Violence and abuse among black people represent an important symbol in the novel, as Morrison shows how violence can be seen as a traumatic experience interfering with the identity development of female characters. By including so many instances of sexual abuse, it seems that Morrison wants to highlight how black people are often abused sexually and how they are perceived as being available for abuse. By portraying various degrees and levels of intensity of violence, Morrison shows how black children are taught about violence from the youngest years and how the white ideology often causes aggression, even something so harmless as Claudia's destroying of the white doll in an attempt to discover the reason of its attractiveness.

Morrison is brave to discuss the problems within the black community, especially regarding the violence black men impose. Linden Peach reveals the implications of such a bold

act: “When they document the violence and rape they have suffered, even as young girls, they are sometimes accused of sowing the seeds of division in what should be perceived of as a homogenous community in the face of white oppression” (1995: 36). Due to many forms of oppression imposed by white people, it is often believed among members of the black community that the black people should be united in their struggles against white people and that they should not criticize members of their own race. Morrison challenges this in *The Bluest Eye* by insisting that the female identity quest “often begins with a negative definition which they must overcome; a definition compounded, as is demonstrated in *The Bluest Eye*, by the way in which black men discharge their frustrations on to black women” (Peach 1995: 44). Therefore, Morrison emphasizes that black men have a crucial role in women’s identity development. However, since black men often physically and psychologically abuse women, their impact is often deleterious.

3.5 From self-loathing to self-appreciation

The Bluest Eye depicts the identity development of female characters whose lives are colored by complex racial and social circumstances. Particular emphasis is placed on the identity formation of young girls susceptible to various influences at a young age. As Gena Elise Chandler skillfully observed: “…the novel illustrates what happens to seeds planted in childhood innocence and watered by racial hatred, social discrimination, and sexual violence” (2003: 66). Morrison portrays all the negative impacts and obstacles on a young girl’s journey toward self-discovery and eventually shows the disastrous consequences stemming from them.

When exploring the reasons for Pecola’s downfall, K. Zauditu-Selassie explicitly states: “Key to understanding Pecola’s dilemma is a consideration of the debilitating effect of white supremacy and the negative aesthetic cast by its malevolent eye” (2009: 27). Both white and black people adopt the white gaze and accept and appreciate the white standards. Elements of popular culture that are widely present everywhere around them convince black people of the beauty standards that apply to white people only. Consequently, Pecola develops an inferiority complex wishing for blue eyes that would make members of both races love and accept her. Furthermore, Pecola grows up in a dysfunctional family, constantly observing physical and verbal fights between her parents. She never develops self-confidence as she does not feel loved by her family, whom themselves struggle with racial self-loathing. Her mother, Pauline, obsessed with white beauty standards that she is aware are unattainable to her, contributes to Pecola’s low self-esteem by proclaiming her ugly at the moment of Pecola’s birth. Pecola’s father Cholly, himself harassed by the white people at the most sensitive period of his life, takes out his frustration and anger on women in his life – he physically and psychologically abuses Pauline and rapes Pecola. This traumatic event completely annihilates Pecola’s identity as she slips into insanity, starts conversing with an imaginary friend, and starts believing the illusion that she got blue eyes. Apart from the white ideology and the neglectful family, the black community played a crucial role in aiding Pecola on a path toward self-destruction. The community harmed Pecola in many ways; they never provided support, help, or reassurance as is traditionally done among black people; they added to her feelings of insecurity and inferiority by gossiping about her and considering her ugly; and, they used her as a scapegoat in order to make themselves feel better about their personal feeling of racial self-loathing.

When it comes to the total annihilation of Pecola’s identity, Carmen Gillespie summarizes the reasons that made it happen: “Pecola is a casualty of the malignant love of her father, the failures of her mother, the disinterest of her community, and a culture that defines her as disposable, insignificant, and ugly” (2008: 52). It was the combination of all of these unfavorable factors that accounted for Pecola’s downfall. Morrison also illustrates the example

of Claudia, Pecola's friend who, although surrounded by the same racist environment, has excellent support from her loving and caring family, so she transcends the superficial ideals and develops self-confidence.

Regarding Morrison's motives for writing this compelling story, one cannot disregard the universality of the important topics the story tackles. Morrison adequately explains: "There can't be anyone, I am sure, who doesn't know what it feels like to be disliked, even rejected, momentarily or for sustained periods of time" (2007: ix). Morrison's foreword clearly indicates that the story is universal, that the search for identity and understanding one's place in the world is not unique, as many people can relate to it. However, by focusing on Pecola's story, Morrison shows how far the feelings of not belonging and being excluded can take an insecure, young female child with no one to turn to. Despite the extremity of Pecola's case, Morrison insists: "But singular as Pecola's life was, I believed some aspects of her woundability were lodged in all young girls" (2007: xii). Morrison points to the sensitivity of young girls' psyche; in this delicate coming-of-age period, girls struggle with insecurity even without additional burdens of political and social hardships.

Carolyn Denard suggests that Morrison's novel teaches readers the following moral: "The solution then, as Morison suggests by implication, is not a political feminism that alienates black women from black men but a more self-conscious appreciation of the particular beauty of women by everyone in the society" (1988: 173). It seems that Morrison wishes to suggest that beauty standards should not be determined by delineating categories, and especially, it appears that she wishes to highlight the dangers of imposing beauty standards on young girls, as they might have detrimental effect on their identity development. Additionally, Morrison depicts that the identity formation of young girls is a painful and fragile process that outside factors can easily influence. In the case of black girls, as demonstrated by the characterization of Pecola, this process can be made more difficult by negligent parents, an unsupportive community, and a discriminatory environment.

4 *Sula*

4.1 General Introduction to *Sula*

Sula, Morrison's second novel, published in 1973, tells the story of the strong and unusual friendship that influenced the identity development of two different female personalities. The novel tackles the controversial topics of various kinds of freedom, patriarchal questions of marriage and monogamy, and complex issues of morality, all taking place within the complex racial and social framework.

Sula follows the identity construction of two best friends, Nel and Sula, who could not be more different from each other, the first one blindly following the patriarchal expectations and the second one bravely opposing them, but whose friendship and bond seem to be stronger than those they have with their family members. By depicting the lives of two black girls growing up in a period of racial tensions, Morrison also explores major taboo topics of the time – a black girl voluntarily getting involved in sexual relationships with white men and a mother murdering her own child.

The novel is organized chronologically by chapters, each labeled with a year when the plot takes place. *Sula* portrays the lives of the residents of the Bottom – the black neighborhood that was awarded to a former black slave by his white master, who tricked him into believing that, despite being hilly, the Bottom was the best place to live. One of its residents, Shadrack, returns from World War I deeply traumatized, but the community accepts his strange behavior, including his celebration of National Suicide Day. The novel also juxtaposes the Wright household with the Peace family. Nel Wright grows up in a traditional patriarchal family, learning the importance of following conventional norms that her mother Helene imposes on her, as Helene decides she and her daughter will live completely different lives from her mother Rochelle, who was a prostitute. On the other hand, Sula Peace lives in a matriarchal family with her mother, Hannah, and grandmother Eva. Regardless of their differences, Sula and Nel become best friends. The girls' participation in an unfortunate accident – when Sula loses grip of Chicken Little's hands, resulting in his falling and drowning in the river – traumatizes their friendship. Sula suffers through another major trauma – she observes her mother's dress catching fire and Hannah dying from burns. Nel and Sula choose to follow two different paths after high school – Nel gets married and starts a family, while Sula leaves the Bottom for ten years, enjoying her independence and freedom. When Sula returns, the black community condemns her for her relationships with white men and for not following patriarchal rules. Sula earns even more negative criticism when she has an affair with Nel's husband, Jude, who consequently leaves his wife and children. Interestingly enough, Sula's immoral lifestyle and total negligence of patriarchal rules positively inspire the black community as they start treating each other with love and respect. However, Sula's death changes the harmonious life in the Bottom, restoring it to the old ways. After Sula's death, the novel fast-forwards to 1965, when Nel faces accusations from Eva when she visits her in a nursing home. Nel finally admits to herself that she was equally responsible for Chicken Little's death as Sula was and that her friendship with Sula was very valuable to her, even more valuable than her unhappy marriage.

When it comes to Morrison's motivation for writing *Sula*, in the novel's foreword, Morrison asks questions that the novel attempts to answer: "What is friendship between women when unmediated by men? What choices are available to black women outside their own society's approval? What are the risks of individualism in a determinedly individualistic, yet racially uniform and socially static, community?" (2004: xiii). Morrison explores the critical topic of female friendship not widely discussed in the literature, depicting the vicissitudes occurring as young girls grow into mature adults. Additionally, Morrison extensively writes

about patriarchal roles and expectations that black women are expected to fulfill and how these gender roles negatively affect black women's psyche. Finally, Morrison exemplifies the rare occasion of individualism by portraying the character of Sula, an independent black woman who defies all racial and gender norms. Morrison explains that women like Sula – "outlaw women" (Morrison 2004: xvii) are captivating characters that provoke thought and capture readers' attention. Morrison expresses her thoughts: "In much literature a woman's escape from male rule led to regret, misery, if not complete disaster. In *Sula* I wanted to explore the consequences of what that escape might be, on not only a conventional black society, but on female friendship" (2004: xvii). Sula's ostracism from the black community results in her firm decision to live her life according to her personal wishes, which often means the complete negation of both white and black people's expectations of how a black woman should behave.

Discussing the subject matter of *Sula*, Victoria Burrows insightfully describes: "Indeed, *Sula* is overwhelmingly a story of loss, of 'gone things' historically and collectively imposed on African-Americans, and individually on the lives of those who suffer the trauma of racism" (2004: 122). When observed on a general level, black people experienced great losses in terms of financial means and job prosperity due to discriminatory practices stemming from slavery and racial past; black people's involvement in World War I brought about many life losses and, in Plum's and Shadrack's cases, lack of mental stability. On an individual level, characters deal with the deaths of family members and friends, while they also deal with loss in the metaphorical sense of the word, when women lose their husbands and friends. Nel, who realizes on the very last page of the novel, the futility of holding a grudge against her best friend, which resulted in the loss of the most meaningful friendship she has ever had, strengthens the subject matter of the novel, exemplifying that people themselves are sometimes responsible for losses. Burrows further adds to the discussion: "Morrison's epigraph (to the future loss of her sons from her immediate family life) gives a clue to the importance of loss and absence as a core theme in the text" (2004: 141). Morrison's epigraph suggests that we should not miss and mourn for people only once they abandon us but that we should do that beforehand while anticipating their imminent loss. In *Sula*, Morrison demonstrates how loss influences the identity development of female characters, both in the literal and metaphorical sense of the word.

Speaking of the uniqueness of thematic elements in *Sula*, Deborah E. McDowell pinpoints: "Toni Morrison's novel, *Sula* (1973), is rife with liberating possibilities in that it transgresses all deterministic structures of opposition" (1988: 79). *Sula* presents constant dualism in the presentation of female characters' identities. These oppositions include but are not limited to traditional families and single-parent families, close-knit community and communal ostracism, the strained relationship between black and white people, the influence of past events on the present moment, differentiation between the top and bottom location of the town, good and evil aspects of morality, etc. Karen Carmean comments on Morrison's reasons for including all these binary oppositions interfering with female identity construction:

> *Sula* insists that readers put aside conventional expectations to enter a fictional world deliberately inverted to reveal a complex reality, a world in which evil may be a necessary good, where good may be exposed for its inherent evil, where murder and self-mutilation become acts of love, and where simple answers to ordinary human problems do not exist (1993: 31).

Sula demonstrates that the question of identity development is a very complex one, easily influenced by a confluence of factors. Therefore, one cannot draw obvious conclusions but has to take into consideration the interplay of opposing aspects, as illustrated in the portrayal of

female characters in the novel. Because of this, the female characters in *Sula* are perplexing and demand an intersectional analysis that ponders a variety of perspectives.

4.2 Conflicts of female identity from diversified perspectives

Exploration of identity formation in *Sula*, in the same manner as in the previous chapter, requires an intersectional analysis of historical, political, social, narratological, and psychoanalytical perspectives. Andersen and Hill Collins explicitly state: "Fundamentally, race, class, and gender are *intersecting* categories of experience that affect all aspects of human life; they *simultaneously* structure the experiences of all people in this society" (2016: 4). While race, class, and gender do influence each person's identity development regardless of the categories of race, class, and gender that they belong to, the impression remains that the black women seem to be affected to a higher degree than other members of the society as they seem to occupy the lowest level in the societal hierarchy.

When it comes to female characters in *Sula*, Philip Page shrewdly observes the critical obstacle that characters face on their path toward individuation: "Like *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* is based on the underlying condition that fragmentation and displacement are the fundamental barriers to the formation of African-American identities" (1999: 183). The fragmentation and displacement that the black population feels stems from several factors, the most important being collective racial trauma. Page further continues: "Morrison thereby directs attention to one potential response to the characters' fragmentation: fusion with another person in the attempt to solidify one's identity" (1999: 183). Unlike *The Bluest Eye*, where Morrison presents the identity formation of a young girl completely alienated from everyone in her life, *Sula* follows the identity development of two young girls who establish a firm friendship that aids them on their path toward adulthood. Through *Sula*, Morrison follows the identity formation of several female characters who differ according to their age, personalities, and life choices but share the collective trauma of racism that colors their lives.

In the discussion of identity, K. Zauditu-Selassie lists an additional problem for black people: "An African view of an individual demands a balance between the collective identity as a member of society and the personal identity as a unique individual" (2009: 28). As it has already been mentioned in the previous chapter, the black communities are closely connected, and belonging to the community and fulfilling their expectations are significant aspects of one's identity. By depicting two best friends who show different levels of consideration and respect for the black community, Morrison illustrates how community and patriarchal traditions affect identity development.

Considering a variety of perspectives that influence the construction of female identity, Morrison establishes a crucial linkage among them, illustrating that it is significantly limiting to analyze female characters without considering them all. Therefore, the lens for viewing the subject of female identity necessarily incorporates historical, political, social, narratological, and psychoanalytical perspectives, including trauma studies.

4.2.1 Historical and political perspectives

The novel follows the period from 1919 to 1965. It takes place after many significant events in American history: after World War I, the Great Migration of black people from rural areas in the South to urban areas in the North, and it takes place over 50 years after the Emancipation Proclamation. Philip Page discusses the pivotal aspects of the historical moment the plot is set into: "As the novel spans the destructive years from World War I through the

Depression to the threshold of World War II in 1941 […] to 1965 and the civil rights movement, it becomes an elegy for the victims of war, poverty and racial violence" (1999: 184). According to the National Archives, more than 380,000 black men participated in World War I, wishing to show patriotism and hoping that white people would accept them as American citizens after such a loyal act. However, even in the army, black people faced discriminatory practices. They were not allowed to train in the same camps as the white people and were predominantly offered menial positions. When the war ended and black soldiers returned home, they expected better living conditions, especially in terms of job opportunities and wages. Still, it seemed that their personal sacrifices in the war did not provoke changes when it came to racist tendencies.[2] In *Sula,* Morrison portrays the disastrous consequences of the war on men by depicting mentally distressed Shadrack and a drug addict Plum. Apart from that, Morrison emphasizes the strenuous work conditions and poor wages that black people were exposed to, which is ironic as black people accounted for the significant economic success of the United States during slavery. Still, despite their work ethic, muscular physique, and desperate need for money, black people could not find appropriate jobs, as evidenced by Jude's dissatisfaction and inability to find a better-paying working position. The novel recounts all the challenges women faced as the result of historical circumstances, such as Eva's morally questionable act of murdering her son and Nel's unhappy marriage.

In the discussion of historical and political perspectives, Ron Eyerman speaks of the far-reaching effect of slavery that is "forever present" (2003: 188). By stating this, Eyerman wishes to suggest that slavery has not only influenced the black population in economic, financial, and exploitative terms but that slavery is also "…primarily cultural, a form of slavery of the mind which denies to the enslaved the possibility to develop their own "talents" (2003: 188). The history of slavery has profoundly affected the mindset and worldview of black people, who cherished traditional patriarchal values, as evidenced in their harsh criticism of Sula's unconventional lifestyle. The impression remains that the black community wishes to distance themselves from the white people's widely held assumptions regarding black people's behavior, which is why the community responds extremely negatively to rumors about Sula's sexual involvement with white people. Apart from that, the black population's intrinsic desire to isolate themselves from everything associated with white culture limited them to their small community in the Bottom, as very few were courageous enough to abandon the world they lived in to acquire education, travel, and broaden their horizons as Sula did. In this respect, many black people were unable to discover their talents and advance their skills, contributing to their economic and financial positions in society. As Eyerman notably remarked: "…slavery is something lived and living, an inherited and transmitted habitus which determines current behavior and thus requires a radical spiritual transformation in order to be rooted out" (2003: 188). Historical circumstances color the black population's past and present, resulting in the traumatized community that still celebrates National Suicide Day and still values and criticize its members according to patriarchal expectations.

As far as historical aspects are considered, it is relevant to mention the place where the novel takes place, as the Bottom is of paramount importance when it comes to the identity development of the black community in *Sula.* Danielle Russell provides an in-depth explanation regarding the significance of the spatial aspect:

> Both the construction and representation of space (whether it is demarcated as geography, place, or landscape) are crucial to identity formation. Space is never neutral; it carries with it a history. Ideological, cultural, and social concerns inform both of our understanding and depictions of space (2006: 1).

[2] (https://history.delaware.gov/world-war-i/african-americans-ww1/)

The Bottom, the place where the black community in *Sula* lives, is filled with historical and social meaning, and it largely influenced the identity development of its inhabitants. The Bottom became the place where the black people lived as a result of the trick that the white master played on his black slave. The master and slave had an agreement, according to which the black slave was supposed to receive freedom and a piece of land for the task that he completed. However, upon completing the job, the master convinced the slave that the Bottom was the best and most desirable place to live in, and the slave naively agreed to accept it even though the weather there was windy and the land was infertile. The blame for the "nigger joke" (Morrison 2004: 4) that determined the place where the black people lived and that established white dominance and superiority over them cannot solely be attributed to white people. While the white master did use sneaky persuasive techniques to convince the black slave that the Bottom was the best land for him, it was the slave that believed his words without much hesitation or doubt. Perhaps Morrison employed this amusing anecdote as a subtle way to imply that, in the same way that both black and white people are responsible for the choice of the Bottom as the place where black people lived, both races are responsible for the racial trauma that the black population experienced throughout the novel.

4.2.2 Social perspective

The portrayal of female characters in *Sula* clearly states that gender roles in the black community in the period that the novel depicts, from 1919 to 1965, were determined according to patriarchy. Pertaining to the reasons for the endurance of patriarchal society, Carol Gilligan and Naomi Snider make an important observation: "But in addition to the political forces that can explain the persistence of patriarchal institutions and values, there are also psychological forces holding these structures in place" (2018: 25). While it is true that patriarchy is deeply rooted in tradition and history, it is the opinions and psyche of the people that keep patriarchy alive. The community living in the Bottom is very traditional and judges people, especially women, based on their fulfillment of patriarchal expectations. Gilligan and Snider draw attention to the implications of living in a patriarchal society: "[…] there is a tension between human development and the culture of patriarchy" (2018: 87). Advancement in terms of the development of skills and knowledge appears to be very challenging in small patriarchal communities as evidenced by many people from the Bottom who choose to stay there and thus miss the opportunity to educate themselves and develop their talents. This is further supported by Gurleen Grewal's claim regarding unfulfilled wishes that characters have: "The novel seethes with desire and its many social curtailments: the desire of Ajax to fly planes, the desire of Jude to do meaningful work, the desire of Sula and Nel to experience the exhilaration of self-discovery. Each of these desires is alienated" (1998: 43). While the main culprits for black people's undiscovered talents and unfulfilled desires are definitely the racial climate they lived in and discriminatory practices they were exposed to, part of the blame also lies in the characters themselves. Their inability to break free from the black community and patriarchal expectations condemn them to a basic life devoid of opportunities and adventure. This is best exemplified in the portrayal of Sula and Nel, who have different value systems and contrasting appreciation for social conventions. Since Sula seems unconcerned by the community's expectations and opinions of her, she decides to leave the Bottom, pursue education, travel, and meet people. On the other hand, Nel chooses to follow the path imposed on her by her family and the black community, never leaving the Bottom and properly fulfilling the traditional role of a housewife and mother. In the discussion of patriarchy, Gilligan and Snider insightfully comment on the reasons why patriarchy has an overwhelming influence on women: "For a woman, however, the relinquishing of her own perspective – or perhaps better to say, the

impermissibility of her having a voice of her own – is built into the very notion of what it means to be a "good woman" (2018: 47). According to the patriarchal expectations, Nel is a good woman in the eyes of the black society, even though she performed the patriarchal role at the cost of her personal happiness.

Morrison further complicates the patriarchal questions by depicting the Peace women who deny conventional norms and reject patriarchy as demonstrated by their behavior. The Peace household is matriarchal, consisting of and controlled by women. The Peace women defy patriarchy in several ways; there are no men in their family, Eva murdered her own son, Hannah is promiscuous, Sula is peculiar when it comes to her life choices and somewhat eccentric behavior when the community's moral standards are taken into consideration. Nevertheless, the novel shows that the same patriarchal norms do not apply to all the women in the Bottom. Barbara Christian makes an important observation:

> …the novel outlines the precise perimeters of the Bottom's tolerance in relation to a woman's behavior. The community absorbs many styles – Helene's ladylike and hypocritical demeanor, Hannah's elegant sensuality, and Eva's arrogant murder of her son – as long as they remain within its definition of woman as wife, mother, or man lover (1993: 81).

The black community in the Bottom not only tolerates Eva's and Hannah's behavior, but they are friendly toward them. On the other hand, Sula is harshly criticized for her lifestyle simply because she decided not to fulfill the patriarchal role of a wife and mother and for living her life on her own terms. Considering how Eva chooses to live her life, it seems hypocritical of her to criticize Sula for her decision not to start a family. On top of that, according to the community's knowledge of the town affairs, Sula did nothing as wrong as murdering someone, which Eva intentionally did. Still, Sula is the one who suffers ostracism and social alienation.

However, as much as the black community criticizes Sula, they simultaneously seem to be intrigued by her, which Pin-chia Feng closely observed: "The Bottom is once troubled by and fascinated with Sula's disruptive power" (1998: 93). Sula's controversial behavior determines the social dynamics of the town. Sula's presence which the community judges as immoral and dishonorable inspires them to be kinder to each other as if this forced and dishonest kindness would emphasize Sula's difference from the black community.

When it comes to social constraints and patriarchal expectations, the novel challenges the traditional opposition between good and evil, and the lines between this set of oppositions are blurred. Should Sula be considered a good or a bad person according to the moral standards of the society she lives in? Sula is independent and free from all social constraints, but she breaks unwritten moral rules by getting involved with married men and white men, which is frowned upon in the black community. Additionally, she does not get married and have children, and she places her grandmother in the nursing home, which is considered to be the ultimate insult in the black culture, where it is expected that younger generations take care of the older ones. Still, despite her actions and the community's disapproval, Sula believes for herself, just like Nel does, that she is a good person, which is illustrated in her conversation with Nel: ""How you know?" Sula asked. "Know what?" Nel still wouldn't look at her. "About who was good. How you know it was you?" "What you mean?" "I mean maybe it wasn't you. Maybe it was me"" (Morrison 2004: 146). Unlike Sula, Nel follows all the traditions blindly, making sure to fulfill all the patriarchal expectations without questioning them. However, even though she led a religious, righteous life, Nel was not awarded in any way for the sacrifices she made to respect traditional values. At the end of the novel, Nel ends up without a husband and a best friend, dealing with financial difficulties and loneliness. Nevertheless, Nel feels that life

is unfair to her, refusing to accept part of the blame herself. She speaks to Sula regarding this: “”I was good to you, Sula, why don't that matter?” […] “It matters, Nel, but only to you. Not to anybody else. Being good to somebody is just like being mean to somebody. Risky. You don't get nothing for it” (Morrison 2002: 144). This way, Sula explains to Nel that good and evil are relative categories. Although Nel did her best to live a life that would be considered good and moral, it did not bring her happiness. On the other hand, Sula lived an adventurous and fulfilled life even though that meant neglecting the patriarchal responsibilities and earning the black community's disapproval and rejection.

Regarding the complex ethical questions, Morrison sheds light on what inspired her to write about the binary oppositions between good and evil: “I started by thinking that one can never really define good and evil. Sometimes good looks like evil; sometimes evil looks like good – you never really know what it is. It depends on what uses you put it to” (“Intimate Things in a Place” 1994: 13). The novel offers many examples of the blurred lines between good and evil. Is Eva a good or bad mother for murdering her son? Does witnessing the murder of Chicken Little make Nel an evil accomplice? Is Sula moral or immoral for living her life how she wishes to and not paying attention to patriarchal limitations? The answers to all of these questions can be debated, as many different perspectives can be taken into account. Therefore, people might have different opinions about what is morally acceptable to be and do. Morrison further explains that usually, people have a defined idea of what it means to be a good person and lead a good life (“Intimate Things in a Place” 1994: 13). This idea seems to be determined by the patriarchal expectations and social constraints, as illustrated by the black community in the Bottom and their ideas about who was good and who was evil. Morrison adds to the discussion: “Evil is as useful as good is, although good is generally more interesting; it's more complicated. I mean, living a good life is more complicated than living an evil life” (“Intimate Things in Place,” 1994: 14). Morrison demonstrates in the portrayal of Sula and Nel why living a good life is more complex; Nel has to suppress her personal longings constantly and wishes in order to please her husband, children, parents, and the black community; therefore, her life appears tedious and unexciting. At the same time, Sula makes the most of her life when it comes to adventures and new experiences, all the while not worrying about other people's comments and expectations of her. Compared in this manner, it seems that it is much easier for Sula to live her life as she pleases, while it is pretty distressing to live a good life according to the patriarchal society as Nel does.

With reference to the black community's attitudes toward Sula's behavior, one of Sula's acts is considered to be unforgivable, and the leading cause of their negative criticism – Sula's involvement in sexual relationships with white men. Morrison explains in great detail how despicable this act was considered to be in the eyes of the black community: “[…] the thing for which there was no understanding, no excuse, no compassion. The route from which there was no way back, the dirt that could not ever be washed away” (2004: 112). Given the painful history that black and white people share, including many forms of physical and psychological abuse that white men imposed on black women, the black community in the Bottom believes that voluntary involvement with white men is impermissible. Still, Morrison explicitly states the hypocrisy behind their negative words and thoughts directed at Sula:

> The fact that their own skin color was proof that it had happened in their own families was no deterrent to their bile. Nor was the willingness of black men to lie in the beds of white women a consideration that might lead them toward tolerance. They insisted that all unions between white men and black women be rape; for a black woman to be willing was literally unthinkable (2004: 113).

Morrison reveals that the black community's opinions regarding relationships with white people are strictly based on gender ideology. Black men harshly criticize black women for getting involved with white men, while they themselves freely interact with white women. However, since the patriarchal society expects women to be prim and proper, the promiscuous behavior of men, including interracial relationships, is not frowned upon. Furthermore, by portraying skepticism and reluctance when it comes to relationships with white people, the black community also contributes to the already tense interracial environment. Therefore, the black population, together with the white people, should be blamed for the inability to solve racial tensions.

However, regardless of the black community's opinion of Sula, she proves to be a very complex character who cannot be defined within the limiting categories of good and evil. Herbert William Rice clarifies: "The novel does not force readers to judge Sula as either good or bad; rather, it invites them to see her as a part of a very complex social structure. Sula is not the center of the picture; she is only one part of it" (1996: 38). The notion of morality and what is thought of as moral or immoral depends on a variety of factors, such as community, family, relationships, friendships, character traits. The novel illustrates this by different parameters that characters employ when they describe someone as moral or immoral. The black community in the Bottom, Sula, Nel, Nel and Sula's mothers and grandmothers all have different levels of appreciation for ethical questions. By depicting a controversial character such as Sula and shedding light on many layers of her personality, Morrison shows that it is impossible to label her clearly as good or bad. While Sula might be considered evil by the black community, she considers herself to be a good person for living her life freely on her terms.

Another point worthy of critical attention is the fact that the black community never truly isolates Sula. They speak ill of her, gossip about her, and disapprove of her actions and lifestyle, but they never expel her from the Bottom. They accept her presence which seems to maintain the necessary balance between good and evil. When it comes to black people's acceptance of what they consider to be evil forces, Morrison explains that this is part of black people's cultural and traditional heritage: "Black people in general don't annihilate evil. We are not well known for erecting stoning centers or destroying people when they have disagreements. We believe that evil has a natural place in the universe" ("Complexity" 1994: 62). There are many illustrations in the novel for the black people's tendency to tolerate what is different, unusual, and evil. The community might discuss events happening in the town, but they tolerate Shadrack's irrational behavior, Eva's abandonment of her children, Hannah's promiscuity, and Sula's return. Therefore, despite criticism and negative comments, the black people in the Bottom do not make Sula's life difficult in any other manner; they actually allow her to live her life as she pleases even though she breaks many of the unwritten moral laws of the black community.

Although it has been mentioned that black men are not expected to follow the conventional patriarchal roles when it comes to their relationship with black women, that does not mean that the patriarchal systems do not affect them at all. According to Patricia Hill Collins, "Thus, gender ideology not only creates ideas about femininity but it also shapes conceptions of masculinity" (2004: 6). Patriarchal society that is primarily based on gender ideology dictates the proper behavior of men and women, but also creates the expected images of femininity and masculinity. These notions influence the male psyche as much as they affect female characters. Jude is unable to perform his patriarchal role of a provider as he is denied decent, well-paid jobs due to racial discrimination, which persuades him to get married for convenience rather than love, thus negatively impacting the identity development of both himself and his wife, Nel. It can be concluded that societal constraints and patriarchal expectations harm both male and female characters, causing significant damage to the

institution of the family. However, in addition to the patriarchy, social norms, and gender roles, racial tensions are among the most influential factors shaping one's identity.

4.2.3 Feminist criticism

On their path toward self-actualization, female characters face a plethora of difficulties caused by racial and gender ideologies. These ideologies are built into the mindset of the Bottom black community and allow them to establish patriarchal expectations regarding men and women and criticize those who do not fit into them. Commenting on the gender roles within a society, Gerda Lerner noticed: "The myth that women are marginal to the creation of history and civilization has profoundly affected the psychology of women and men" (1986: 221). Gender ideology and the traditional roles associated with gender have a tremendous impact on both men and women. In *Sula*, Morrison portrays the characters of Nel and Jude, who frantically try to fulfill the roles assigned to them at the expense of personal happiness. They end up in an unhappy marriage, with Jude eventually cheating on Nel and abandoning her and Nel realizing that blindly following patriarchal rules causes great damage to identity development.

Nevertheless, despite the established gender ideology, Betty Friedan keenly observes that women are not forced to follow the patriarchal rules dutifully: "The fact is, girls today and those responsible for their education do face a choice. They must decide between adjustment, conformity, avoidance of conflict, therapy – or individuality, human identity, education in the truest sense, with all its pains of growth" (1974: 166). In this regard, Morrison depicts two completely different female characters, Sula, who chooses to defy the patriarchy, and Nel, who adheres to all the rules and expectations, pointing to the prices that they have to pay for their choices. Although the novel's ending gives an impression that neither of the women ended up happy, it is evident that Sula lived an independent, fulfilled life without any regrets, while Nel conformed to other people's wishes and requests. Additionally, as Friedan warns, women are unable "…to grow and fulfil their potentialities as human beings" (1974: 69). Due to the woman's patriarchal role as a mother and a housewife, she is unable to explore her talents and skills, which is also a very significant aspect of identity development. Friedan further states: "A woman cannot find her identity through others – her husband, her children" (1974: 324). This dangerous assumption of women that a husband and children are enough for them to live a content life proves untrue in Nel's case. Nel devoted her whole life, time, and energy to her family, completely neglecting personal growth and building a part of her personality independently of her husband and children. Thus, when her husband left her, and the children grew big enough not to depend on their mother so much, Nel found herself lonely and miserable. Another vital point worthy of discussion is that Nel does not question her life choices and totally succumbs to patriarchy. This testifies to Carol Gilligan's shrewd conclusion regarding "how accustomed we have become to seeing life through men's eyes" (2003: 6). Perceiving the world and women through the "male gaze" seems to be widespread among the members of the Bottom community. In *Sula*, Nel ultimately accepted the male gaze in her perception of the world and herself. It is noteworthy to mention that Nel did not adopt the male gaze on her own; she learned about it from her mother. By illustrating this, the novel directs attention to the dangers of transgenerational adoption of the male gaze that parents pass on to younger generations.

Furthermore, in the discussion of the male gaze that both men and women adopt, it is worthy of critical attention to mention that the community in the Bottom solely blames the woman when there is any deviance from the expected behavior attributed to them. Regarding this, Carol Gilligan succinctly comments: "Thus, when women do not conform to the standards

of psychological expectation, the conclusion has generally been that something is wrong with the women" (2003: 14). The black community in the Bottom does not even consider that racial and gender ideologies might be the ones that influence women's behavior, or that not acting by patriarchal expectations is not necessarily wrong.

When it comes to the treatment of black women by white people, Evelyn L. Barbee and Marylin Little make an interesting analogy: "The position of African-American women in American society is unique because the same ideology used during slavery to justify the roles of Black women underlies the external, controlling images of contemporary African-American women" (1993: 185). Even though slavery is officially abolished and black people are supposed to be in much better social and economic positions than before, the novel shows that this is not really the case. Apart from black men not being given the same job opportunities, the presence of the "white gaze" is constantly felt even though Morrison does not depict prominent white characters in the novel. When Nel and her mother accidentally enter the wrong carriage intended for white people only, the conductor uses a derogatory word to address Nel's mother and send them to the correct place. In addition to this, the reaction of the white people who discovered Chicken Little's body after his death reveals their racist opinion; they even considered putting his body back into the water, and they found it annoying that they had to hand over the body to the family. Another example of the inescapable white gaze is the trick the white master plays over the black slave when he convinces him to accept the Bottom as his reward. Herman Beavers elucidates the matter: "In *Sula*, an example of place-making is the story of how an act of subterfuge that lets whites retain the best, most arable land and blacks come to occupy what is known as the Bottom" (2018: 4). Additionally, the valid question to be asked is why the black slave was so quick to trust the white master's words and why he allowed himself to be easily convinced that the white person had his best interest at heart given their painful history. Andersen and Collins might offer the correct answer to the question: "[…] dominant forms of knowledge have been constructed largely from the experiences of the most powerful – that is, those who have the most access to systems of education and communication" (2016: 2). Considering the fact that white population was better educated and more knowledgeable on a variety of topics due to their privileged position in the society and easy access to educational facilities, the black slave probably inferred that the white master knew more about the area and that he should trust his opinion. However, while the master definitely did know more about the quality of lands, that did not necessarily mean that he was going to give up on an opportunity to trick a black slave and keep the best land for himself. Overall, Morrison pays special attention to the spatial aspect and the fact that the black people live there due to white people's superiority, not only in economic and social terms but apparently in their convincing abilities. The spatial factor is significant as people largely form their identities within the place where they grow up and live.

Nevertheless, similar to *The Bluest Eye*, the overall black community in *Sula* adopts the white gaze in their perception of the black population, resulting in internalized racism. One of the many negative images that white people associate with black women is that of their sexuality. Patricia Hill Collins elaborates on white people's perception: "Long-standing ideas concerning the excessive sexual appetite of people of African descent conjured up in White imaginations generate gender-specific controlling images of the Black male rapist and the Black female jezebel, and they also rely on myths of Black hypersexuality" (2000: 129). As these wrong generalizations of the black population persist many years after the abolition of slavery, they still hurt black people's feelings, so they attempt to disprove them by resorting to strict patriarchal and ethical rules. As evidenced in *Sula*, the black community in the Bottom is infuriated with Sula's promiscuous behavior as she fulfills some of the white people's stereotypes about black women. Perhaps the black community directs its anger at Sula and perceives her as dangerous as it is easier for them to internalize hatred and racism than to

comprehend the bigger problems: the white gaze and patriarchal expectations of women. Jan Furman defines the underlying problem prevalent in the black community: “The predominant evil in their lives, more pervasive and enduring than Sula, is the external force of oppression” (1999: 235). However, as the black people are aware of the inability to fight and stand up to white people, they use Sula as the scapegoat and take out all their negative feelings regarding racism onto her. Still, the novel does not offer enough textual evidence to speculate whether the black community acts the way it does due to secret envy that Sula broke the moral and patriarchal laws or due to condemnation for her willful disrespect of the black tradition. Regardless of their reasons for alienating Sula, the comparison can be made to *The Bluest Eye* and the community’s treatment of Pecola. Both Sula and Pecola served as scapegoats for the black community’s feelings of internalized racism and concealed racial self-loathing. However, a significant difference can be made in female characters’ responses to scapegoating and social alienation; while Pecola develops an inferiority complex and insecurity regarding her racial identity, desperately wishing to obtain the blue eyes, which ultimately leads her to insanity, Sula deals with communal ostracism proudly, giving the impression that the community cannot influence her self-confidence.

Furthermore, what seems to disturb the black community in the Bottom even more than the fact that Sula’s promiscuous nature speaks in favor of white people’s stereotypes and prejudices, is their assumption that she has had sexual relationships with white men. Collins accurately describes the complex relationship between black women and white men: “Traditionally, freedom for Black women has meant freedom *from* White men, not the freedom to choose White men as lovers and friends” (2000: 162). The black community feels that Sula has betrayed her tradition and ancestors, who have been abused and exploited by white people by willingly socializing with white men. On the other hand, Sula, who feels completely free from all societal constraints, uses her personal relationships to exercise her freedom and independence most conspicuously.

Discussing the influence of racism on black people, Victoria Burrows skillfully observes that Morrison portrays the harsh reality for black people in the face of white ideology: “In *Sula* then, Morrison takes us behind the veil of the distortions of white ideology and shows us the black world as it is, a world of survival against all the odds, but one with profoundly painful individual and collective consequences” (2004: 137). The trauma of racism affects the black community in the form of collective trauma, as black people become inclined to adopt the white gaze when they perceive themselves and the people around them. Additionally, discriminatory practices stemming from the trauma of racism significantly affect the black community’s quality of life as they have limited job and advancement opportunities resulting in financial struggles. When it comes to black women specifically, Burrows notably remarks: “This is not to suggest that the women of the Bottom are weak and their behavior ineffective, but to emphasise their enormous courage and perseverance in the face of their powerlessness amid the exigencies of the dominant white world” (2004: 137). Racism especially took its toll on black women, as illustrated in the novel. Even though Nel’s mother is wealthier and belongs to a higher social class in comparison to other members of the black community, she is looked down on by a white conductor who addresses her in a derogatory manner, allowing her to understand that white people do not make considerable differences among black people. Moreover, Eva, abandoned by her husband and left alone to care for the children, is forced to sacrifice her leg to provide for her family financially. Additionally, Sula and Nel face difficult choices of complying with or defying patriarchal expectations primarily because they are black women and should move away from the white ideology in order to show respect for the black tradition.

When it comes to the impact of racism on female characters, Trudier Harris discusses the unfavorable circumstances surrounding Sula’s life: “The cards dealt out to her are all

marked with the notation that she is black and female; therefore, winning hands must be kept from her. Paralleling the structure that defines the fate of the Bottom, the fate of Sula's existence is similarly determined" (1991: 57). Despite Sula's tremendous effort not to allow the concepts of race and gender to influence her life path and ambitions, she finds herself unable to permanently leave the Bottom and racial and gender prejudices in it. Sula did go on to accomplish much more than her fellow black female friends, but for unknown reasons decided to return to her hometown, even though that meant constant social ostracism and alienation.

In connection with Morrison's portrayal of the tense relationship between black and white people, Herbert William Rice pinpoints:

> In short, African-Americans and their culture represented all of those things that white Americans did not want to recognize about their culture: that freedom was bought with enslavement, that prosperity was bought with poverty, that life for some was bought with death for others – in short, that white was defined by what it was not: black (1996: 51).

Sula starkly reveals the grim truth that, despite the absence of slavery, the black reality is primarily colored by white presence. The inferior position in society carries the painful memories of enslavement, backbreaking physical labor, sexual exploitation of women, etc. Black people even inhabit the Bottom due to the arrangement made by the slave and his master. The novel demonstrates the painful realization that white ideology significantly influences the identity development of the black community.

4.2.4 Narratological perspective

Morrison employs several narrative techniques that depict the complex question of the development of female identity in Sula and illustrate how different perspectives and traumatic experiences have a profound but contrasting influence on women.

The title exemplifies a set of peculiar strategies that Morrison employs in her narrative. While the title is named after a character, readers expect Sula to be the novel's main protagonist and the most present character. However, Morrison chooses to do the opposite and removes Sula from the novel as she dies early. Morrison comments on the reasons for making this narrative decision: "I wanted Sula to be missed by the reader. That's why she dies early. There's a lot of book after she dies, you know. I wanted them to miss her presence in that book as that town missed her presence" ("Intimate Things in Place" 1994: 15). Although Sula is not physically present in the novel, her presence reverberates throughout the whole story, and it affects the black community's behavior and attitudes. When the community faces Sula's return from her travels, they perceive her as an evil force and decide to fight off her evil spirit by being extraordinarily kind and good to each other. However, when Sula dies, and the evil associated with her is gone, the black community restores to its old ways, which include frequent displays of meanness and hostility. Morrison mentions the other reason why she decided to name the novel after the character of Sula: "I also wanted them to dislike her a lot, and to be fascinated, perhaps, but also to feel that thing that the town might feel – that this is something askew" ("Intimate Things in Place" 1994: 16). Sula is the most eccentric and controversial character in the novel which is why she attracts attention, not only of the black community in the novel but of the readers as well. Sula's peculiar nature and actions would shock even the present-day communities as her behavior is often considered unbecoming for a woman, especially in patriarchal societies.

Unlike *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison chooses to tell this story through the omniscient narrator. Mieke Bal refers to this kind of narrator as an "external narrator" (2017: 13), offering the definition: "This term indicates that the narrating agent does not figure in the fabula as an actor" (2017: 13). Comparing the narrator who is also a character in the story as Claudia in *The Bluest Eye* is, and the omniscient narrator in *Sula*, the crucial difference is evident in narrating the truthful version of events. Bal compared two different types of narrators, stating that the difference between them "…entails a difference for the narrative rhetoric of truth" (2017: 13). Telling the truthful version of events is a relative notion, as both the external narrator and character-bound narrator might lack essential pieces of information. The omniscient narrator is believed to be more objective as their depiction of the story is not impeded by personal involvement or emotions. On the other hand, the narrators, who are also characters, tend to narrate events from their unique perspectives, displaying subjective and biased points of view, often not including other characters' perspectives.

One of the most prominent advantages of including the omniscient narrator in the novel is Morrison's insistence on not judging the characters and not imposing opinions on readers. *Sula* requires readers' participation and active involvement in reading the novel. This allows for multiple interpretations and ethical conclusions.

On the other hand, despite the omniscient narrator's presence, a plethora of textual gaps account for the novel's mysterious moments. Bal uses the word "ellipsis" (2017: 90) when she describes gaps in narration, defining them as "an omission in the story of a section of the fabula" (2017: 90). The segments of the story that are omitted prevent the readers from comprehending the complete personalities of female characters, they arouse curiosity and encourage them to fill in the textual gaps with their own imagination. One of the most notable instances of ellipsis is Sula's long absence from the Bottom. While Sula never explains where she was and what she did, it is evident that the time she spent away from her hometown affected the development of her identity to a great extent, as she turned into a sophisticated woman who dresses fashionably and who thinks and behaves differently in comparison to her fellow community members. Another mysterious ellipsis relates to Eva's abandonment of her children and strange return with ample financial means but without a leg. The black community's imaginative gossiping followed these unexplained occurrences. They believed Sula was engaged in intimate social encounters with white men, while they assumed Eva sacrificed her leg in order to collect money from the insurance company that would allow her to provide existential means for her family. Morrison's use of this narrative technique accomplishes several purposes. Intentionally omitted events from characters' stories add a mysterious note to characters' personalities, making them the talk of the town and the center of readers' attention. Using the narrative technique of ellipsis, Morrison allows the readers to feel the same way as the inhabitants of the Bottom, as they are exposed to the same amount of information regarding the female characters. Additionally, the novel points to the contrasting attitudes of the community toward Sula and Eva. While the black community harshly criticizes Sula for the unconfirmed rumors they believed were true, they admire Eva since the unconfirmed story about her actions represents an act of sacrifice for her children. While both of these rumors are baseless, the community blindly believes them, thus forming their opinions of Sula and Eva in an opposing manner, negative and positive. Furthermore, even though the novel is infused with ethical doubts and ethically questionable actions of the characters, Morrison does not judge and does not impose her opinion, letting the readers and the black community of the Bottom make their conclusions.

Regarding the visual representation of certain events that profoundly impact female characters' identity development, Morrison often utilizes grotesque images. Audrey L. Vinson keenly observes the symbolism behind the use of grotesqueries: "Explicit images shine brilliantly through the novels as graphic representations of personal and social dilemmas"

(1985: 19). Visual brutality of Chicken Little's death emphasizes the contrast between the tragic ending of his life and Sula's and Nel's young age. Despite their innocent intentions, the girls are faced with a tough choice between confession and keeping it all a secret. Morrison portrays several deaths in the novel in a visually brutal way; apart from Chicken Little, whose hands slip from Sula's grasp and he drowns in a river, Hannah dies from severe burns after she got caught up in a fire, and Plum is murdered by his mother. Morrison explicitly depicts these scenes, highlighting their importance when it comes to the identity formation of female characters. The death of Chicken Little has a profound effect on both Sula and Nel, as this is their first encounter with death for which they feel responsible. The impact that this event has had on Nel is evidenced by her thoughts of Chicken Little and her initial denial and later acceptance of responsibility more than 40 years after the incident. Plum's death affects Hannah's and Sula's opinions of Eva and makes them question her expressions of love. When it comes to Hannah's death, this unfortunate accident revealed complex familial relationships, as Sula watched in shock and amazement while Eva risked her life trying to save Hannah. Morrison also displays grotesque elements in Shadrack's irrational behavior and mental decline and the celebration of the National Suicide Day that he initiated. In addition to this, powerful and often disturbing visual images are evident in female characters' sacrifice of their bodies and even their lives for what they perceive to be a more significant cause; Sula cuts her hand to protect Nel and herself from the mean boys who bully them; Eva sacrifices her leg in order to provide financial means for her family; Eva jumps through the window in a desperate attempt to save Hannah from getting burnt to death. These grotesque images shed light on the importance of these events in shaping female characters' identities.

When it comes to the linguistic means that Morrison employs, Bessie W. Jones places particular emphasis on the usage of names: "Names of places, people and events become a part of Morrison's rhetorical strategy whereby she presents and suggests certain attitude towards human relationships" (1985: 49). While reading *Sula*, the impression remains that Morrison infused names with metaphorical meaning and symbolism. Commencing with the very name of the town where the black community lives, the Bottom, Morrison suggests that the black population is at the bottom of society, both because the white people tricked them into living there and because of their naivety and lack of experience and knowledge. By using this particular name of the town, Morrison also illustrates the power of the manipulation of language. Linden Peach comments on this: "The linguistic shift emphasises how language can be and has been manipulated by those in authority to maintain their advantage and protect their positions, a concern developed in all Morrison's work" (1995: 40). The white master in *Sula* who deceives the black slave is the representative of the white population since he is superior both because he has power and authority over the black slave and because he is more educated and knowledgeable than him. Morrison demonstrates that white people used language as a means of manipulation in addition to other forms of manipulation over black people. Apart from this, Morrison gives specific surnames to the two families of the main characters. These surnames have sarcastic connotations, as "peace" and "right" do not seem to designate the female characters' personalities. While Nel and her mother definitely do try to be prim and proper in the eyes of society and always do the right thing as their surname suggests (Wright), the novel indicates that this does not bring them happiness and fulfilled lives. On the other hand, the Peace household does not demonstrate peace in their familial relationships, as their family dynamics are fraught with disagreements, arguments, and even murder. Regarding the meaning of the word "peace" and its connection to the novel, Gurleen Grewal sheds light on the more profound symbolism of peace for the black community: "For Morrison, peace is what the black folk of the Bottom have lacked and longed for from 1895 to 1959; peace is not something that existed and was then disrupted by World War I. It has been absent from the beginning" (1998: 59). For the black population, peace was absent from their lives on a

personal and collective level. As a community, black people have suffered significant discrimination and oppression in political, economic, and sexual terms. Consequently, their personal lives were affected when it came to their social and familial relationships, creating a deeply traumatized community.

4.2.5 Literary trauma studies and psychoanalytical perspective

Sula can be analyzed as a piece of trauma fiction. The novel explores the collective and individual traumas experienced by characters, such as Sula and Nel's traumas of growing up in a black, poverty-stricken community, the trauma of the death of family members and friends, the collective trauma of racism and economic oppression, trauma of loss and alienation. The novel shows how traumatic experiences and memories shape the identities of individual characters and the community as a whole.

Discussing how traumatic experiences are portrayed in fiction, Michelle Balaev states: "Literature elicits numerous representations of trauma, often emphasizing the contextual factors and place-based aspects of an extreme experience" (2012: xii). By selecting Bottom as the setting of the novel and including the metaphorically colored story about how black people started living there, Morrison illustrates the power and extent of racial trauma, as the complex relationship between white and black people affects the lives of the Bottom inhabitants throughout the whole novel despite the absence of white characters. Balaev believes that the spatial aspect has a considerable influence on characters' responses to traumas: "place is thus a central aspect of traumatic experience in literary representations because place provides a conceptual framework in which emotional responses occur" (2012: xv). However, despite Bottom being the reminder of the racial trauma the black community suffered, Morrison shows the characters' great attachment to it, especially by depicting Sula's return to Bottom after her travels.

Sula depicts a severely traumatized black community where living through traumatic events and carrying the traumatic burden from previous generations impede female characters' identity development to a large extent. Collective traumas that the inhabitants of the Bottom experience as the community stem from racist discrimination and war engagement. Even though the female characters in the novel do not have firsthand experience of slavery and war, the adverse repercussions are evident in the overall communal behavior and each character's personal relationships. When it comes to the power of an external trauma over members of the community, Sigmund Freud commented: "Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism's energy and to set in motion every possible defensive measure" (1961: 23). Defensive mechanisms that the characters have developed are evident in Shadrack's celebration of the National Suicide Day, Hannah's promiscuity, Nel's escape into family life and Sula's cold façade that eventually reveals a vulnerable woman who has become dependent on a man's love and attention. Therefore, it is evident that collective trauma that is passed down through generations shapes the identity of both individuals and the community.

When it comes to individual instances of trauma that the characters have suffered through, one of the most prominent ones is the trauma of being a witness to the event of death, which, apart from causing significant distress over an individual, also causes post-traumatic stress disorder, which Cathy Caruth defined in the following manner:

> … a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or

> behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event (1995: 4).

Female characters in the novel display different forms of behavior when faced with the traumatic and harrowing event of witnessing the death of someone they know. Sula experiences the "numbing" that Cathy Caruth mentions when she witnesses her mother's burning; her lack of reaction is interpreted differently; some believe she was shocked and disturbed by the scene, while others believe she intentionally did not attempt to help Hannah. On the other hand, when Hannah learns of Eva's murder of her brother Plum, she questions her mother's feelings of love and care toward her children. When it comes to such a brutal act as murdering one's own child, Laurie Vickroy rationalizes these acts: "The murders are the consequence of excessive identification between mother and children; however, it is also evident that overidentification becomes destructive *because* it is locked into a culturally based trauma" (2002: 54). In her wish to provide the best for her children and see them succeed, Eva overidentifies with her children and feels great disappointment if they fail to act according to her expectations which is why she resorts to a criminal act. Still, Vickroy warns of the consequences: "Denver and Sula (Eva's granddaughter, mirror image, and surrogate daughter) survive their mothering, but are scarred by fear and alienation as a result. These children fear their death-dealing mothers…" (2002: 61). Vickroy's interpretation leads to the conclusion that Sula perhaps left town and placed Eva in a nursing home because she was afraid of her grandmother's formidable personality.

Unlike these two examples, when the female characters could not be held accountable for the cause of death, the situation appears different regarding Chicken Little. In the innocent game children often play, Chicken Little's hands slip from Sula's grasp, and he drowns. This event has had a profound effect on Sula and Nel. It strengthened their friendship as they had an important secret to keep. Discussing the trauma of being a witness to traumatic events, Shoshana Felman insightfully observed: "To bear witness is to *bear the solitude* of a responsibility, and to *bear the responsibility*, precisely, of that solitude" (1995: 15). Sula and Nel both carry substantial burden regarding Chicken Little's death, both in terms of keeping the event a secret from everyone and not revealing their involvement in the cause of his death. While readers do not get insight into Sula's thoughts about the guilt she may or may not have felt, Nel only becomes aware of the fact that she was an accomplice to Chicken Little's murder when Eva expresses her point of view regarding the incident. Victoria Burrows describes the time that some people need to come to terms with the traumatic event as "[…] a temporal delay, a break in psychic time, that carries the individual(s) beyond the shock of the unexpected moment(s) of trauma" (2004: 152). Nel experiences "the temporal delay" both due to tremendous shock over the incident itself and her inability to observe the situation objectively and accept her responsibility.

Pertaining to the bond between an individual and community with regard to traumatic events, Kai Erikson asserts: "So trauma has both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies. It draws one away from the center of group space while at the same time drawing one back" (1995: 186). Despite the individual and collective traumas that people suffer through, they find themselves unable to leave the community. This is best exemplified by Sula, who makes an attempt and leaves the Bottom but still decides to come back for reasons that are never disclosed, even though the community in the Bottom constantly reminds her of all the traumas she has experienced.

Additionally, Morrison emphasizes the severity of the traumas that characters have lived through by physically labeling their bodies. Victoria Burrows comments on the physical symbols of trauma: "In this novel, psychic traumas are literally written onto the bodies of the main characters, and as a result many have bodies that are physically marked in some way,

whether by birthmark, self-mutilation, or through the process of violent death" (2004: 120). Sula has a birthmark that changes as she matures physically and psychologically and that other characters perceive differently depending on their personal feelings toward Sula. Eva sacrificed her leg in order to provide for her children; her severed leg serves as a powerful metaphor for the physical sacrifice she was forced to make, and the symbol of racist trauma she experienced, as one of the major consequences of racist trauma is the poverty that black people had to deal with. In addition to these examples, the violent death of Plum, whom his mother killed, reflects the tremendous consequences of the war trauma that Plum experienced. In the case of both Plum and Shadrack, Morrison depicts the post-traumatic disorder that the two former black soldiers suffered from as a result of the physical and psychological consequences of the war.

Throughout the whole novel, Morrison does not show any optimism when it comes to coming to terms with traumatic events. Judith Herman explained the inability to overcome traumas in the following manner: "Resolution of the trauma is never final; recovery is never complete. The impact of a traumatic event continues to reverberate throughout the survivor's lifecycle" (1992: 211). This is evident in all the characters' behavior and thoughts; her mother's death haunted Sula in her final moments; Eva was disturbed by thoughts of Plum's death; Nel still could not forget about Chicken Little's death even in her old age; and all the community members of the Bottom could not accept and come to terms with racist trauma, as illustrated by their desperate attempt to destroy the construction site of the tunnel where they were denied a job on account of their race. However, their attempt was futile, murdering them in the process as a subtle indication that deeply rooted issues such as racism and discrimination cannot be eradicated so easily.

Adding to the discussion of characters' inability to come to terms with traumatic experiences, Victoria Burrows sheds light on a critical perspective: "What both Sula and Nel lose, for completely different reasons, is the capacity to acknowledge, assimilate, voice and mourn their traumatic grief within the community of women" (2004: 150). Neither Sula nor Nel wishes to confide in or share the emotional burden of the traumatic event that has marked their lives. Although they are surrounded by many women who could offer them support and guidance, especially when their sensitive age is taken into consideration, the young girls live with their traumas in isolation. Similar to *The Bluest Eye*, the novel suggests that it is challenging to deal with trauma without communal and familial support. Morrison demonstrates this in portraying female characters in Sula, as Sula, Nel, and Eva keep their unresolved traumas and the grief they feel over them throughout their lives.

4.3 Female characters' identity crises

4.3.1 Sula

Sula is a truly formidable character due to her independence, uniqueness, and personality traits that provoke comments, gossip, and communal reactions. Morrison explains the essence of Sula's personality: "She is a masculine character in that sense. She will do the kind of things that normally only men do, which is why she's so strange. She really behaves like a man. She picks up a man, drops a man, the same way a man picks up a woman, drops a woman" ("Intimate Things in Place" 1994: 26). Sula's controversial lifestyle includes many actions that the community frowns upon; she leaves the Bottom and spends a decade away from her family and friends, never discussing her whereabouts; when she comes back, she lives what the community considers to be a promiscuous, immoral life that may be attributed to and forgiven to men, but not women. In this way, according to the patriarchal society present in the Bottom, Sula displays qualities that are typical for men. Morrison further comments: "So that

quality of masculinity – and I mean this in the pure sense – in a woman at that time is outrage, total outrage" ("Intimate Things in Place" 1994: 27). Due to her extravagant behavior, Sula is the talk of the town, but interestingly enough, despite the negative comments, the town does not interfere with her return and stay in the Bottom.

Sula's personality traits and lifestyle emphasize how she is different from other female members of the community. Barbara Christian draws attention to Sula's difference from the black community: "She defines herself outside of the sex, class, race definitions of the society. That she becomes a pariah in her community has much to do with her resistance to any clearly recognizable definition of a woman that the Bottom can tolerate" (1985: 76). Sula is aware of the patriarchal expectations of a black woman in a racist society. Still, she decides to defy them in search of her happiness. In that way, Sula's way of life criticizes the town's way of life, as Sula is authentic and does not pretend to be someone that she is not. Perhaps the reason why the community in the Bottom ostracizes Sula is that they are jealous and in awe of her bravery to live her life to the fullest, something that no one else from the community is courageous enough to do.

Sula's life journey, identity development, and life choices are fraught with contradictions. When it comes to patriarchal expectations of the society that Sula lives in, she constantly defies them by deciding not to get married and start a family, leaving the Bottom, getting involved with married and white men, and placing her grandmother in the nursing home. All of these decisions that Sula has made shock the black community in the Bottom, which firmly believes these actions are unbecoming of a black woman. However, although Sula is aware of the traditional beliefs of the Bottom, she proves what Dennis Walder concluded when he stated that: "Nostalgia and national identity are inextricably entwined" (2011: 5). Significant part of everyone's identity is a national sense of belonging and even though Sula never reveals her reasons for coming back to the Bottom, it is evident that she feels nostalgic for the town where she grew up.

Pertaining to the reasons why Sula resolves to return to the Bottom, Jill Matus indicates the causal connection between an individual's identity and the community: "One of the paradoxes of identity is that we can only know ourselves as selves if we have a sense of separateness, but at the same time we can only know ourselves in relation to others" (1998: 61). When it comes to one's identity development, Matus suggests that both individual and communal processes are significant and that one cannot reach their self-actualization without the interaction with the community. Matus further comments: "Just as Sula needs to be isolated from the Medallion community in order to create and contemplate herself, so she also needs to know herself in relation to it" (1998: 62). Therefore, while Sula's abandonment of the Bottom was significant on her path towards self-realization, she evidently understood that the black community's environment was equally important since she decided to return and spend the rest of her life there.

As much as Sula tries to escape from the patriarchal and social constraints imposed upon black women in the Bottom, she finds herself succumbing to them as she returns to her hometown and grows older. Commenting on Sula's efforts to avoid the confinement of black women to patriarchal structures, Philip Page says: "As the novel posits a world governed by binary oppositions and exerts sustained pressure against that structure, Sula personally opposes the binary world, tries to escape it, experiments with subverting it, and finally yields to it" (1999: 195). Sula's characterization resists the existence of binary oppositions; her identity development and life path show that not everything can be categorized into binary opposites, such as the good and evil, black and white, proper and improper way of life, the right or wrong behavior. Sula's character illustrates the impossibility of classifying people into binary categories as the popular opinion (in this case, the opinion of the black community) is not the only one that should be taken into consideration.

Discussing the relevant factors that underlie Sula's uniqueness and difference in comparison to black women living at the same time, Carmen Gillespie offers a splendid description of Sula's personality:

> Sula is misunderstood. She is a woman who is sexually, psychologically, and culturally liberated in a time and space where there is no place for a free woman. Even sexuality is for her not an act of union, but of self-affirmation. She does not need the traditional markers – wife, mother, lover – to define herself (2008: 192).

Sula feels alienated from and rejected by her family, friends, and the overall black community. In the place and at the time when the female experience is defined by a strict set of rules adhering to racial exclusion and gender politics, Sula appears to be a fervent proponent of freedom and liberal rights for black women. Commenting on the communal perception of Sula, Gillespie further adds: "Nel understands what Sula represents to the community, an embodiment of all that they fear: change, difference, and, most importantly, themselves" (2008: 193). The communal attitudes toward Sula are complex and often contradictory. Although the black community insists that Sula's unscrupulous behavior harms the community's morals, Sula inspires them to be better and nicer to each other, thus improving the social and familial relationships. Additionally, despite their personal opinion and comments, the black community in the Bottom never evicts Sula. La Vinia Delois Jennings explicates the reason for this: "Unlike Christianity that calls for evil to be cast out and the flesh subdued in order that spirit may reign, from an Africanist perspective both good and evil are essential to balance, wholeness, and wellness" (2008: 30). Black people accept the existence of evil forces as something natural and necessary within a community, resulting in the Bottom's acceptance of Sula's behavior and actions. Interestingly enough, when Sula passes away, her positive influence over the community fades, restoring the old habits, which Patrick Bryce Bjork expounded on: "In death as well as in life, Sula remains a force for change in the community which, in Morrison's complex world, presents both negative and positive ramifications" (1994: 80). Sula's personality, behavior, and actions have been so unusual and outrageous that she continues to determine the community's dynamics long after she passes away.

Other significant aspects of Sula's personality are her romantic relationships and understanding of female sexuality. As Josie Brown-Rose skillfully observes: "Sula is a character that is aware of the centrality of both her race and gender in defining her identity" (2006: 70). Sula understands all the setbacks that follow a life of a black girl, but she does not allow them to determine or affect her life. Sula does not consider the sexuality of black women a taboo topic, and she engages in romantic relationships with white men and married men, breaking unwritten moral laws of the black community. Sula challenges the traditional notions of marriage and friendship when she gets involved with her best friend's husband. For Sula, who believes that sexuality is natural and that unconditional friendship means sharing everything, adultery is not a severe crime and definitely not a reason to break off marriage or friendship. Due to this act, Sula earns contempt both from Nel, her best friend, and the entire black community in the Bottom. Moreover, Sula's non-existent relationship with her father and the fact that she has not been able to see an example of a successful romantic relationship between a man and a woman in her own family possibly explain her reluctance to get married and start a family and her willingness to be involved in strictly casual relationships, as this is the example that her mother set out for her.

With reference to Sula's liberal opinion regarding female sexuality and patriarchal understanding of the institution of marriage, J. Brooks Bouson suggests: "Indeed, it can be

argued that part of Morrison's purpose is to use the uninhibited Sula to endorse the late 1960s and early 1970s ideology of sexual liberation and freedom from oppressive social and inner restraints" (2000: 47). J. Brooks Bouson implies that Morrison tackles a sensitive topic for black people – female sexuality, hoping that the black population will free themselves from the past negative images of women and work towards creating sexual freedom. Adding to the discussion, Bouson thoroughly explains the unfavorable opinion of black women: "According to racist mythology, which constructs black women as the racial and sexual Other, African-American women are hypersexed and therefore debased" (2000: 48). These negative portrayals of women stem from the period of slavery but continue to haunt the black people as the result of collective trauma of racism. For this reason, the black community is appalled at Sula's behavior as they consider it immoral and disrespectful of the black people's history and traditions.

Nevertheless, despite Sula's total neglect of patriarchal rules and unwritten moral laws regarding black women's behavior, she herself falls victim to traditional patriarchal attitudes and falls in love with Ajax. John N. Duvall spells out the reason why Sula becomes infatuated with Ajax: "Ajax and Sula approach each other as equals; Ajax respects Sula's mind as only one other character previously had – Nel" (2000: 61). As Ajax perceived Sula the way that she wanted to be looked at – as a woman equal to a man, she admired him and cherished him. However, as Sula's feelings toward Ajax turned into love, her expressions of love started resembling those typical of patriarchal romantic expressions. With reference to the meaning and understanding of the concept of love in patriarchy, bell hooks recounts: "Love in patriarchal culture was linked to notions of possession, to paradigms of domination and submission wherein it was assumed one person would give love and another person receive it" (2000: 101). In her relationship with Ajax, Sula succumbs to the patriarchal understanding of love wishing to possess and control him. Ajax, who was happy to be with someone different from a traditional black woman of the time, flees from Sula and abandons their relationship. Regarding the impact that romantic involvement with Ajax has had on Sula's identity development, Aoi Mori points out: "When she learns his full name, she is able to articulate what caused her to discontinue her quest for identity although by that time she is too exhausted to resume the search" (1999: 42). Sula's realization that she did not even know Ajax's real name acts as a wake-up call; it sheds light on the nature of their relationship, but it also shows how this romance negatively affected her identity, changing her perspective on patriarchal roles and encouraging her to conform to traditional society. Kevin Everod Quashie adds to the discussion by expressing wonder at Sula's abrupt transformation when she enters a new relationship: "Her progression from practicing reckless selfishness to being Ajax's other is quick and shocking, especially because Ajax is hardly engaged in the process of being Sula's other" (2004: 58). The fact that Ajax was not as intensely involved in a relationship with Sula as she was perhaps suggests that this was one of the principal reasons why she fell in love with him to the extent that she was willing to compromise her beliefs and principles. The novel gives an impression that Sula had great success with men, whether black or white, single or married, and she was usually the one to discard them and not think highly of them, as in the case of Jude. Perhaps the different and unusual circumstances of Ajax not being immensely interested in her aroused her interest and intensified her feelings. As much as Sula was different from her mother, this desperate need for male attention was a pattern of behavior that she could have inherited from her, as Hannah was very liberal with her promiscuity, and Sula observed that while she was growing up.

Regarding Sula's characterization, it is impossible to overlook her physical appearance, which has inspired gossip and imaginative stories. Morrison describes her physical features in the following manner: "Sula was a heavy brown with large quiet eyes, one of which featured a birthmark that spread from the middle of the lid toward the eyebrow, shaped something like a

stemmed rose" (2004: 52). Sula's birthmark is noticed by everyone who meets her, and it draws attention to the multiplicity and plurality of her identities and how people perceive her. The characters' understanding of the meaning of the birthmark suggests their personal opinion of Sula, Nel thought it was a rose, Jude that it was a snake, Shadrack a tadpole, "[…] that was how he knew she was a friend – she had the mark of the fish he loved […]" (Morrison 2004: 156). Sula's mark changes and gets darker over time, perhaps representing her maturity and highlighting her uniqueness and difference from others, as the birthmark is what people first notice about her. Regarding the change in Sula's birthmark, Doreatha Drummond Mbalia makes an interesting analogy: "Interestingly, her rose-shaped birthmark symbolizes her increasing degradation and isolation. In the mold of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Sula's birthmark darkens with each successive violation of the community's taboos" (1991: 45). Interpreted in this manner, Sula's birthmark is closely connected to morality, and each time Sula violates the moral laws of the black community, this is evident in the gradual darkening of the birthmark. Adding to the discussion, Linden Peach takes Sula's birthmark metaphor to a higher level by saying: "Sula's mark which in the beginning of the novel is a stemmed rose, suggesting individual fulfilment and rootedness, eventually becomes ashes, suggesting the potential dissolution not only of herself but of black cultural identity in general" (1995: 51). The interpretation of the birthmark as a stemmed rose offers positive connotation, but as Sula life progresses and she makes several morally questionable decisions her birthmark starts appearing like ashes. Grewal compares the moral deterioration of Sula to the overall black community, which also changes over the course of the novel, giving in to internalized racism. Additionally, as Sula did yet another thing that the black community considered to be unforgivable – she observed her mother burning up in flames and dying, they thought that her birthmark was a symbol of this brutal act: "That incident, and Teapot's Mamma, cleared up for everybody the meaning of the birthmark over her eye; it was not a stemmed rose, or a snake, it was Hannah's ashes marking her from the very beginning" (Morrison 2004: 114). Sula's birthmark could be interpreted as her connection to her mother, the bond that is initially marked with innocence and unconditional love, but the bond that alters over time and becomes tainted by Hannah's words regarding her love towards Sula that her daughter overhears and by Sula's surprising numbness at the sight of her mother's dying. When Sula overhears her mother saying: "You love her, like I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference" (Morrison 2004: 57), these words deeply affect Sula's understanding of the concepts of love and family which is evident in her later decision not to get married and have children. By saying these words, Hannah implies that she loves Sula because she has to and not because she wants to, which would be severely traumatizing for every child to hear. Another relevant event that happens right after Sula hears these words is the death of Chicken Little, which arguably could be connected to Hannah's words.

Adhering to her philosophy of life, according to which she is free to act as she desires despite her skin color and gender, Sula responds to the boys bullying her and her best friend by cutting herself. According to Kathleen Marks's analysis: "By doing to herself what the boys would do, Sula aggresses the aggressors. By cutting off a piece of herself, Sula reveals that she has internalized a self-loathing so deep that she does not mind causing herself harm in order to deflect harm" (2002: 1). Marks suggests that Sula hurts herself to stop the boys from causing her and Nel even more pain. If this analysis were applied to Sula's overall life, a pattern could be observed, as Sula very often does things that hurt her in order to avoid greater harm, which causes her social, familial, and communal isolation.

Probably the most outrageous and extravagant aspect of Sula's personality in the eyes of the black population of the Bottom is Sula's view on morality. Sula's actions reveal her liberal worldview, while Sula's words directed at Nel express her viewpoint regarding the existence of good and evil: "Being good to somebody is just like being mean to somebody.

Risky. You don't get nothing for it" (Morrison 2004: 144). Throughout her life, Sula witnesses many good deeds that have not been rewarded and many bad actions that have not received adequate punishment. Therefore, it is understandable why she believes that the concepts of "good" and "bad" are abstract. Sula additionally provokes astonishment and disapproval as she questions the existence of God in a very religious black community. Rachel C. Lee explains the symbolism of Sula's atheist beliefs: "By asking "Which God?" Sula poses the relativity of even this monolith and questions both Eva's version of good and evil and good and evil in general" (2005: 187). The conclusion can be drawn that Sula's peculiarity compared to other female characters is also evident in her rejection of the existence of God and clear boundaries between good and evil.

When discussing Sula's identity development, it is necessary to mention several traumatic experiences that she has been exposed to and that have influenced the shaping of her personality. In the same manner as all other black women in the novel, Sula was exposed to racist sexist trauma because of the fact that she was a black girl growing up and living her life in a world where white people dominated financial, economic, and cultural spheres of life. However, Sula does not allow these disadvantages to define her. As K.C. Lalthlamuani observes: "*Sula* centers on a character who believes that she can create for herself an identity that exists beyond community and social expectations" (2014: 64). Sula lives her life as if she were not black and a woman, she does not allow these categories to interfere with her wishes and ambitions, despite the patriarchal expectations and communal reactions. Hortense J. Spillers appropriately described Sula's actions: "Whatever Sula has become, whatever she is, is a matter of her own choices, often ill-formed and ill-informed" (1993: 213). Even though Sula may have made some mistakes and could have done some things differently, at least she created her path in life by herself, and she does not blame anyone else for her actions, unlike other characters in the novel.

Probably the two most important and defining moments that shaped Sula's identity are the traumas of her being a witness to her mother and Chicken Little's death. Trudier Harris believes that Sula learned the true meaning of freedom after Chicken Little's death as she was not blamed and punished for her actions: "Life, death, responsibility, the limits of behavior – are all contained in Chicken Little's death. Once Sula ignores them and moves into a realm of her own unrestrained seeking and exploration, she is forever outside the world view of the Bottom" (1991: 77). At the time of Chicken Little's death, Sula was in crucial years when it comes to identity development, and she learned very young that it is possible to avoid punishment, both the actual punishment and the moral judgment, for such a severe crime. This led her to believe that she does not need to follow any moral laws but is liberated to live her life as she pleases. On the other hand, unlike Chicken Little's death, where Sula could be blamed for the reason for his passing away, when it comes to her mother's death, the situation is different. While Sula still carries the trauma of being a witness to Hannah's death, she does not cause it. Still, the black community and her family were shocked at the fact that Sula just stayed still and observed her mother burning and that she did nothing to help her, unlike Eva, who jumped out of the window in an attempt to save her daughter. Sula's thoughts at the end of the novel reveal that her decision not to help was not intentional: "I didn't mean anything. I never meant anything. I stood there watching her burn and was thrilled. I wanted her to keep on jerking like that, to keep on dancing" (Morrison 2004: 147). Therefore, Sula's observation of her mother dying is probably related to the absence of emotions on Sula's part regarding the event, as Patricia McKee noticed: "Sula's capacity to "just look" depends on experiencing no emotions or intentions that connect her to objects and no meaningful links, either, between one experience and another" (1999: 158). Sula's cold and emotionless façade probably resulted in two traumatic experiences that largely influenced her identity development: her overhearing her mother saying she does not like her and Chicken Little's death, as "The first experience

taught her there was no other that you could count on; the second that there was no self to count on either. She had no center, no speck around which to grow" (Morrison 2004: 118). Morrison suggests that these two events proved crucial in Sula's identity development, leading her toward alienation from everyone, her family, friends, and the black community. As a result, Sula neglects one of the essential features of the black community, the sense of union and togetherness. As La Vinia Delois Jennings concludes: "Sula remains up to the last a paragon of ruthless individualism – an excessive reliance of self that is intolerable to an African sensibility" (2008: 54). The black people have always been characterized by unity, they have stuck together through many historical ordeals, and Sula defies this tradition by purposefully choosing total alienation from collective identity. Even though Sula, unlike Pecola in *The Bluest Eye*, willfully distances herself from the black community, family, and friends, social and communal alienation does not bring anything positive to either of the two female characters.

Taking Laurie Vickroy's explanation on the manifestations of traumas into consideration, which claims that:

> A psychology of oppression emerges from these dehumanizing and conflicted situations, wherein a process of internalizing oppression brings about social and psychic manifestations of trauma, such as emotional restriction, fragmented or split identity, dissociation, and problems with self-knowledge (2002: 36)

It is evident that Sula suffers from severe consequences of going through traumatic experiences (such as the death of her mother, the death of Chicken Little, and racist trauma) that resulted in her voluntary isolation from her family, friends, and the black community and what appears to be emotional distance and numbness. Sula deals with suppressed emotions regarding traumatic events in complete isolation, as she never speaks of them to anyone, especially regarding the circumstances regarding Chicken Little's death and the disturbing words she overheard her mother saying. Even though Sula gives an impression of a person delighted with her life choices, the price she had to pay for her voluntary isolation was constant scrutiny and judgment by the black community. Nevertheless, Trudier Harris emphasizes that Sula is consistent with her decisions: "Still, Sula is consistent in living by the philosophy she has evolved for herself; when she becomes ill, she does not turn for assistance to the people she has ignored all along. Instead, she suffers alone" (1991: 78). Sula is not hypocritical and lives her life according to her own rules and moral laws. Very well aware of the fact that she intentionally chooses alienation, she stays loyal to her decision and dies alone. When Nel visits her and confronts her about her isolation, Sula reiterates her life philosophy, claiming that it is better to choose your own loneliness than have it imposed by other people: "But my lonely is *mine*. Now your lonely is somebody else's. Made by somebody else and handed to you. Ain't that something? A secondhand lonely" (Morrison 2004: 143). While Sula does die alone, that is her personal choice, unlike Nel, who lived her life according to her mother's wishes and who was abandoned by her husband.

The fact is that Sula undergoes a wide variety of life experiences – she experiences adventures, traveling, love, pain, and death, and it seems that this could be one of the reasons why Morrison decides Sula should experience her very own death at a young age. Regarding Sula's rich journeys through life, Carolyn M. Jones comments: "Sula – and we have to admire her – affirms her own mode of being in the world. All that is left for her to experience is death" (1999: 145). In her final moments, Sula is alone, isolated from her family, friends, and community. However, Danielle Russel makes an important observation when discussing Sula's alienation: "While Sula does die alone, her emotional isolation is not as complete as she has

tried to convince herself it is – her final words reflect an enduring connection with both Nel and Shadrack" (2006: 111). As much as Sula appears to be a self-sufficient individual who does not need the company of others, either in a romantic or friendly manner, her thoughts and actions show the opposite at the end of her life. Her relationship with Ajax reveals the romantic side of her personality, and her very last thoughts are directed at Nel – her wish to share with her best friend the exact emotions she felt when she passed away. Sula also remembers the word "always" that Shadrack whispered to her immediately after Chicken Little's accidental death; the word provided Sula with comfort as she knew that her secret was safe with Shadrack. Sula's death testifies to the contradiction of her own personality, as she is constantly split along isolation and connection, claiming throughout her whole life that she longs for complete alienation from her family, friends, and the black community but finds herself constantly drawn toward them.

According to the words of Robert Grant, despite, or maybe because of her eccentric behavior, readers mostly seem in awe of Sula's personality:

> Seemingly of the Devil's party, Sula commands the fascination and perhaps even the respect (if not entire admiration) of the reader despite the fact that her social and familial behavior refutes most of the "positive" black interpersonal values cited by sociologists researching the Afro-American social condition (1988: 92).

Although Sula's characteristics are opposite to the values that are cherished in the black community, her independence and self-confidence that prevail even though she is a black woman living in a racist, sexist society is genuinely admirable. Commenting on Sula's unique features, Morrison notes: "And people such as those are always memorable and generally attractive. But she's troublesome" (2019: 310). Furthermore, it is important to shed light on Morrison's observation that Sula did not really deserve such contemptuous attitudes and ostracism by the black community by emphasizing that Sula "[…] never does anything as bad as her grandmother or her mother did" ("Intimate Things in Place" 1994: 16). Nevertheless, even though Sula's actions are objectively not as severe as those done by some other female characters, the black community does not seem to be able to accept her difference and her rejection of the traditional black values, which appear to be unforgivable.

4.3.2 Eva

Eva, Sula's grandmother, is one of the most fascinating characters as she symbolizes all the challenges of black motherhood in the 1920s, such as lack of financial means, failure of patriarchal institutions, and absentee fathers and partners. Eva's identity is shaped by her past actions and the challenging mother role she tries to perform to the best of her abilities. In an attempt to describe such a captivating character, Barbara Christian notes: "Eva as mother both gives and takes life away. She is as complex a character because of and in spite of her motherhood as any I have read about. She is as mean as life, as energetic as the cold wind up in the Bottom, as unpredictable as warm weather in January" (1985: 28). Eva's characterization is fraught with contradictions; she is simultaneously the most considerate mother and the cruelest mother presented in the novel. When Eva's husband abandoned her with their three children, she was left without any financial means but with great emotional support from the black community in the Bottom, who helped her generously. Eva left her children with a neighbor, claiming she would return the next day but disappeared for 18 months. The fact that

the neighbors took excellent care of her children while Eva was away testifies to the importance of the community and the immense support and connection between its members. When Eva returned, she was missing one leg but had enough money to provide for herself and her children. Eva's physical deformity gave rise to the circulating rumors that she intentionally faked an injury incident with the train in order to collect the money from the insurance. Although this act might appear immoral, Paula Gallant Eckard sees it in the following manner: "Eva's body provides the central metaphor of love and sacrifice in *Sula*, adding both mythic and inverted dimensions to the maternal. The past reveals the terrifying and disturbing extent of Eva's maternal sacrifices" (2002: 53). The immense sacrifice that Eva was willing to make for the sake of the wellbeing of her children symbolizes Eva's genuine and unconditional love. Another example of Eva's eternal devotion to her children was her futile attempt to save Hannah; Eva risked her life by jumping out of the window when she saw Hannah in flames. Eva also shows her generosity by adopting the three boys and caring for them. Apart from that, Eva also saved her son's life when Plum was a baby and had severe health problems. All these actions illustrate that Eva would go to great lengths to ensure her children were healthy and provided for.

However, being a mother in a discriminatory, racist society is far from easy, as demonstrated by Eva's actions. After *The Bluest Eye*, Morrison shows once again that expressions of love in the black community are entirely different from those within the white population, as black mothers are often forced to show tough love for the benefit of their children. Terry Otten mentions the characteristics of this kind of motherly love: "Sometimes love is cruel and pernicious. It is the "tough love" of mother for child that finds most powerful expression in Morrison's work; however, it is at the same time a force so absolute that it forbids nothing, manifesting itself in startling acts disguised by cruelty" (2013: 83).

The most shocking and, at the same time, the cruelest act that Eva commits is murdering her son. When Plum came back from the war, he was deeply traumatized by the war experience, and he became addicted to narcotics, which is something that Eva could not tolerate. Perceived from one perspective, Eva's killing of Plum is an act of sacrifice; she loves him and cares for him to the extent that she cannot watch him sink deeper into addiction; from another perspective, this is a highly selfish act, as taking Plum's life away should not be Eva's decision to make. As Laurie Vickroy observes: "Moreover, she denies his war trauma. She cannot bear her own child's helplessness and is therefore closed off from attempting a more healing approach" (2002: 55). Eva does not even attempt to help Plum and save him from his addiction. After everything that Eva has done for her children, she cannot accept Plum's behavior, saying: "Being helpless and thinking baby thoughts and dreaming baby dreams and messing up his pants again and smiling all the time. I had room enough in my heart, but not in my womb, not no more" (Morrison 2004: 71). As much as Eva loved him, she simply could not provide the same kind of nurturance and care as she did when he was a baby. Eva decides to murder Plum by setting him on fire, an act which Barbara Christian describes in the following manner: "She performs a ritual killing inspired by love – a ritual of sacrifice by fire" (1993: 79). It is an ironic coincidence that Eva murdered Plum by using fire and that soon enough she felt enormous sadness and helplessness in her attempt to save Hannah when she was burning up in flames and eventually died. Trudier Harris compares Eva's contrasting attitudes toward Plum and Hannah: "She rewards those who serve her well; she casts aside those who do not. That is the distinction between her murder of Plum and her risking of her own life to save Hannah's" (1991: 75). Although Eva shows love toward all her children, she feels terribly disappointed when Plum gives in to addiction. Eva does not express any sign of regret for what she has done, firmly believing that it was the best decision.

By describing both the positive and negative aspects of Eva's personality, Morrison points to the ambiguous nature of the concepts of love and morality. Terry Otten draws attention

to the important comparison between Eva's opinion regarding the crime that she has committed and the crime that Nel has committed: "Her crime is paradoxically an act of compassion – and Nel's apparent innocence is nothing less than criminal" (1989: 43). Eva believes that the act of watching somebody die and doing nothing to attempt to save them is a crime as serious as murdering someone. In the same manner that she believed that Nel was guilty of taking part in Chicken Little's murder, she also thought that Sula observed her mother's death as she "[…] remained convinced that Sula had watched Hannah burn not because she was paralyzed, but because she was interested" (Morrison 2004: 78). It is noteworthy to emphasize that Eva believed that Sula and Nel's observation of deaths was morally unacceptable while she thought that her crime was deserving of forgiveness as she did it out of sympathy. Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos adds to Eva's defense by claiming: "And she does not really *cause* any of her adult children's deaths; she merely hastens death to save them from misery" (1999: 88). When Eva concludes that Plum has no purpose in life, she believes it is noble to help him to end it, as she wanted him to "die like a man" (Morrison 2004: 72). One of the possible interpretations of Eva's belief that she was entitled to make this decision on her children's behalf could be her awareness of all the sacrifices she has made for them, so she believed she had the right to control them and impose her opinion.

Despite the fact that Eva's expressions of love seemed logical and sufficient when historical and social circumstances are taken into consideration, Hannah often wonders whether her mother loved her as she did not display love in the most obvious manner, such as playing with children, laughing, spending time with them. When confronted with this question, Eva answers blankly: "…what you talkin' 'bout did I love you girl I stayed alive for you can't you get that through your thick head or what is that between your ears, heifer?" (Morrison 2004: 69). Given that her children and grandchildren are brought up in different financial and economic circumstances, Eva finds it hard to explain to them that: "Wasn't nobody playin' in 1895. Just 'cause you got it good now you think it was always this good? 1895 was a killer, girl. Things was bad. Niggers was dying like flies" (Morrison 2004: 68). It is evident that Eva was the best mother she could be, doing her best to provide for her children, even sacrificing her body and accepting physical deformity for the rest of her life in order to ensure that her children are well taken care of. bell hooks explains Eva's thoughts: "Eva's responses suggest that finding the means for material survival was not only the most important gesture of care, but that it precluded all other gestures" (2000: 538). Given the financial difficulties and economic disenfranchisement which prevented Eva from finding a well-paid job, Eva was forced to turn to illegal means in order to provide funds for her family. Because of everything she has endured, Eva does not feel obliged to defend or explain herself when her children doubt if she loves them.

The strength and fierceness of Eva's character are evident in her switch from being a victim whom her husband abandoned to being a victimizer who makes crucial decisions regarding her children's lives. The main reasons for this dramatic change are the difficulties that Eva experienced and dealt with successfully, as Gurleen Grewal states: "The roughness of her own hardships have made Eva insensitive and intolerant to others' vulnerabilities and needs" (1998: 50). Because Eva faced all the setbacks in her life alone, she expects others to be capable of doing the same and has no understanding or empathy toward those who are unable to do so. In this way, as Patrick Bryce Bjork concluded, Eva "…defied the odds against abandoned black women in 1921" (1994: 64). Eva breaks prejudices that consider black women weak and dependent on men. Therefore Eva, in the same manner as Sula, is a very peculiar character who disregards racist and sexist expectations of what a woman should be and do. Paula Gallant Eckard compares Eva's attitudes toward life to the female characters in *The Bluest Eye*: "Unlike Pauline and Pecola Breedlove, who embrace white societal standards, Eva refuses to subscribe to conventional notions about female beauty and sexuality" (2002: 54).

Eva is truly a fascinating character as she simultaneously shows respect toward black culture and traditions and defies them with her actions. Contrary to Pauline and Pecola, who are obsessed with white beauty standards, Eva does not seem too concerned about her physical appearance; she even deforms her body for a greater cause. Additionally, even though she criticizes Sula for not leading a conventional life adhering to patriarchal expectations, Eva herself defies the social conventions by being an independent black woman who leads her household without a man.

Pertaining to the unusual relationship between Eva and Sula, it is important to highlight that these two characters are fundamentally different and very similar depending on various perspectives. Even though it would probably be difficult for both of them to admit it, Sula and Eva have a lot in common, they are both survivors, they are both incredibly strong, and they both seem insensitive to other people. It appears ironic, even hypocritical, that Eva criticizes Sula for her independence and for not getting married when Eva is highly independent and never remarried. The reasons for Sula's self-sufficiency could be the role models she was exposed to while she was growing up; both her mother and grandmother were self-sufficient women who lived without men.

Eva's adoption of the three boys speaks significantly of her generosity and motherly qualities but also reveals her attitude toward the question of identity in black culture. Eva adopted and took care of the three boys. However, even though they were different in age and appearance, she gave them the same names, treated them equally, and told everyone they were the same age. Consequently, they started looking the same, and people perceived them as if they were the same. Aoi Mori reveals the truth behind Eva's actions: "…the point is, however, that she satirizes how little significance the names of black people and their individuality hold for whites" (1999: 47). Mori suggests that Eva does not name the boys wishing to emphasize the irrelevance of naming people in the black community. Perhaps Morrison uses Eva's act as a metaphor for how white people see black people, as they do not really care about their names; additionally, historically, white people gave new names to black people irrespective of their family names and how they were named at birth.

When describing Eva's astonishing personality, Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos says: "Her life has been economically, socially and historically determined in the most narrow way; but in spite of it all, her character is one of fierce protectiveness, gracious regality, magnanimity, deep intelligence, and great courage" (1999: 88). Eva is a truly captivating character, as she represents a strong, brave, independent black woman who never gives up on life and fights. Despite all the unfavorable life circumstances, Eva has never given up, she has fought all the racist, sexist, economic, and emotional obstacles that life has given her, and even at an old age and in a nursing home, Eva proves to be a dominant figure who outlives her children and her granddaughter and who continues to stay resilient to anything that life might offer her. Eva symbolizes an inspiring black mother who would do anything for the wellbeing of her children, even if it means hurting them, because, in her opinion, there is nothing immoral or illegal when it comes to their happiness.

4.3.3 Hannah

Hannah, Sula's mother and Eva's daughter demonstrates how seemingly benign and unintentional comments and words might negatively influence children's identity development. When Sula overhears her mother saying, "You love her, like I love Sula. I just don't like her. That's the difference" (Morrison 2004: 57), Hannah influences many of her daughter's future actions and points of view, without even being aware of that. One possible interpretation could be that these words affected Sula's opinion about having children and

having a conventional family. Additionally, immediately after she hears these words, Sula engages in an innocent game with her friends when Chicken Little accidentally loses his life.

Speaking of the powerful influence that parents have over children, Judith Herman notes: "The developing child's positive sense of self depends upon a caretaker's benign use of power" (1992: 52). Perhaps due to Hannah's parenting style or her careless choice of words, Sula grew into an independent woman who did not feel any close connection to her family. Sula's alienation from the family is best illustrated by her innocent observation of her mother burning to death and placing her grandmother in a nursing home, both showing complete disregard for family values according to black tradition. Additionally, Hannah's single life and casual relationships with men could have impacted Sula's romantic life, which was fraught with casual relationships and the absence of a meaningful bond with a man. However, unlike Sula, who was harshly criticized for her romantic engagements, the black community did not dislike or condemn Hannah. As Terry Otten observed: "Childlike in her innocence and free of guilt, Hannah is not only tolerated by the women to whose husbands she makes love, but is also respected. They feel complimented that someone else wants their husbands" (1989: 31). While both Hannah and Sula participated in adulteries, it seems that the black community had a more forgiving attitude toward Hannah because she did fulfill her patriarchal duty – she had a family, but perhaps also because Hannah was only involved with black men, while Sula's involvements with white men deeply insulted the black population of the Bottom. Another crucial difference in Bottom's relationship with Hannah and Sula is that the community did not feel sad over Sula's death, while they felt great sadness when Hannah passed away.

Hannah's tragic death, caused by fire, speaks volumes about her relationship with her mother and daughter. On the one hand, Eva risks her life by jumping out of the window trying to save Hannah. On the other hand, Sula observes the situation, not even attempting to help her mother. When it comes to the events leading to Hannah's death, Barbara Christian analyzes the series of signs predicting what would happen: "What Morrison does in creating this tragedy of Hannah's burning, reminiscent of the burning of witches, is to pile up sign upon sign, some caused by human beings themselves, others beyond their control, that in hindsight can be read as indications of an imminent tragedy" (1993: 80). Morrison points to the importance of the traditional beliefs, superstitions, and religion when describing the way of life of the black community; all of which Sula shamelessly rejects. Eva understands that several strange events that happened, such as Hannah's dream, Sula's peculiar behavior, and her losing her comb, which never happened to her, should have been indicative of the tragedy that was about to happen. However, Eva did not pay attention to them, resulting in Hannah's death. If the same analysis were applied to the character of Sula, her moral negligence of the black community's rules and traditions destined her to death, completely isolated from the black community.

4.3.4 Nel

Nel, Sula's best friend and her complete opposite regarding character traits and life decisions, represents a dramatic symbol of the historical depth of racist, sexist, and patriarchal issues within the black population. Nel's identity is severely threatened due to her controlling mother and the pressure and needs that Nel feels to follow traditional rules. Simultaneously, Nel is a typical woman of the time, exemplifying the majority of black women living in the Bottom. However, despite her best efforts to fulfill her family and community's expectations, Nel does not end up living a happy and content life.

The most influential presence in Nel's life while she was growing up was her conventional and rigid mother, who wanted a stable life for her daughter, the same one she had. Nel's mother transfers her personal feelings of patriarchal duty and internalized racism to her

daughter; she does not like Nel's nose, so she keeps reminding her daughter to pull her nose in an attempt to appear more similar to the nose that white people have. Nel's parents, especially her mother, molded her into the perfect paragon of patriarchal virtue and black people's beliefs. However, that also meant that "Her parents had succeeded in rubbing down to a dull glow any sparkle or splutter she had" (Morrison 2004: 83). Throughout the novel, readers never learn of any ambitions, talents, wishes, or thoughts that Nel has. Nel lives her life by her mother's wishes and plans.

Blindly listening to her mother and doing her best to fulfill all her expectations and wishes, Nel's attitude toward life dramatically changes when she goes on a trip with her mother in order to attend her great-grandmother's funeral. Nel met her grandmother, who was a prostitute and who did not have a good relationship with her daughter, Nel's mother, whom her grandmother raised. This visit and understanding her mother's background completely changed Nel's perspective on life and her identity development. At that point, Nel realizes that her identity and personality exist independently of other people: ""I'm me," she whispered. "Me." Nel didn't know quite what she meant, but on the other hand she knew exactly what she meant. "I'm me. I'm not their daughter. I'm not Nel. I'm me. Me." Each time she said the word *me* there was a gathering in her like power, like joy, like fear" (Morrison 2004: 28). Nel's trip has made her aware of her individualism, and her new perception of her identity encouraged her to become friends with Sula, even though her mother disapproved. As Barbara Christian concludes: "Nel Wright's sense of her own identity has begun with her trip to her great-grandmother's funeral and the beginning of her friendship with Sula Peace" (1993: 83). Socializing with Sula was the first thing that Nel did that did not comply with her mother's wishes and the first thing that Nel did selfishly for her own happiness.

On the trip to attend the funeral, Nel's mother and Nel accidentally got into the wrong train carriage, the one that was designated for white people. Nel witnessed the white conductor talking down to Helene, and the black people in the carriage giving her mother inappropriate looks, and she became aware of the power of the white gaze that she was not familiar with living among the black people in the Bottom. That day, Nel made an important decision: "It was on that train, shuffling toward Cincinnati, that she resolved to be on guard – always. She wanted to make certain that no man ever looked at her that way. That no midnight eyes or marbled flesh would ever accost her and turn her into jelly" (Morrison 2004: 22). However, even though Nel promised herself that she would never lose her individuality, she is unable to resist the patriarchal pressure; that is precisely what she does. Nel never even leaves Medallion again.

When Nel gets married to Jude, both of them get involved in a marriage with each other for the wrong reasons; Nel in order to fulfill her patriarchal role in a traditional community, and Jude as a reaction to a racist, discriminatory society that deprived him of a job he wanted. Their marriage is based on patriarchal concepts, and Diane Gillespie and Missy Dehn Kubitschek believe that Morrison makes her own comment on marriages by suggesting what went wrong in Nel and Jude's union: "To ensure that her husband remains dependent on her goodness, that he needs her, Nel encourages his worst traits. Morrison's diction indicates her disgust with the male childishness and female manipulation engendered by this process" (1997: 72). Morrison implies that Nel and Jude's marriage depended on the mutual necessity that was based on gender roles established in the black community, where a man is a provider, and a woman is a caretaker, while other elements that are usually associated with marriage such as love and affection seem to be absent from their relationship. Discussing how a women's identity is connected with her choice of partners, Erik H. Erikson makes an important observation by saying: "…I think that much of a young woman's identity is already defined in her kind of attractiveness and in the selective nature of her search for the man (or men) by whom she wishes to be sought" (1994: 283). In Nel's case, it can be deduced that her identity

is closely related to traditional notions of patriarchy and gender roles as she decides to fulfill her patriarchal duty at the cost of finding happiness and true love. The fact that Nel's married life is not joyful illustrates Nel's thoughts when Sula comes to visit her after a decade: "She had forgotten how deep and down it could be. So different from the miscellaneous giggles and smiles she had learned to be content with these past few years" (Morrison 2004: 98). The best evidence of Nel's unhappiness is the reality that she has not laughed wholeheartedly since she got married.

However, Jude's adultery and Nel's best friend's participation in it completely shatter Nel's individuality, creating an identity crisis. Robert Grant comments on Nel's feelings about losing her husband: "For Nel, the loss of Jude initiates a racial identity trauma, a disorientation of the complacent, socialized self" (1988: 99). Losing her husband equals identity trauma because Nel has never developed an individual sense of self; her identity has always been related to other people, first her parents, then Sula, and finally her husband. After losing her husband and best friend simultaneously, the crucial aspects of Nel's personality are called into question. Nel expresses her grief and isolation: "That was too much. To lose Jude and not have Sula to talk to about it because it was Sula that he had left her for" (Morrison 2004: 110). When the affair between Sula and Jude was exposed, the entire black community blamed Sula for the failure of Nel's marriage. Even though Jude also participated in infidelity and he was the one who chose to abandon his family without even asking for forgiveness or attempting to work on his marriage, which revealed that there were deeper problems in their union, it seems that it was easier for the Bottom community to blame Sula since she was a woman and she stayed in the Bottom; she did not run away in the way that Jude did. When Nel loses her husband, she loses the sense of her identity, which shows that her identity has always been connected to other people. Diane Gillespie and Missy Dehn Kubitschek emphasize the difference between Nel's and Sula's attitude toward isolation: "Unlike Nel, who cannot differentiate sufficiently (first from her mother and later from her children), Sula experiences fortified boundaries, both with her mother and with the community as a whole" (1997: 82). On her path toward individuation, Sula's identity construction occurs independently of other people, which is why her happiness and sense of accomplishment are not bound to the black community or her family. On the other hand, Nel depends on other people in her pursuit of the meaning of life. Because of this, Nel's world is completely shattered once she loses her husband.

Furthermore, Nel's focus on her family to such an extent that she neglects all other areas of her life, such as career aspirations, education, and social life, can be attributed to something that Laura Brown termed "codependency" (1994: 140), a very common coping strategy in the general population of women. Laura Brown explains the term in great detail:

> […] codependency is a broad term describing a pattern of interpersonal relating in which the person diagnosed codependent needs to be needed and places others at the center of her life, reading their minds, hypervigilantly attending to their wants, and doing whatever is necessary to preserve the well-being of the relationship – presumably at considerable cost to the codependent's own mental health (1994: 140).

Nel perceives her husband and children to be the center of her world; she devotes all her time and energy to maintaining the household and ensuring that all their needs are met, simultaneously ignoring her personal needs and wishes. Consequently, when her husband abandons her and her children naturally leave when they come of age, Nel experiences an identity crisis, unable to find a purpose in her life.

Despite the facts that Sula and Nel were best friends for many years and that Nel was exhilarated upon Sula's return to Medallion, although she was aware that the two of them led completely different lives at that point, Nel expresses her concealed thoughts regarding Sula's life choices only at Sula's deathbed. Nel speaks bluntly to Sula: "You *can't* do it all. You a woman and a colored woman at that. You can't act like a man. You can't be walking around all independent-like, doing whatever you like, taking what you want, leaving what you don't" (Morrison 2004: 142). In this way, Nel reveals that her opinion of Sula is very similar to that of the black community, as she also disapproves of her lifestyle.

Still, as the novel progresses, it seems that Nel gradually comes to terms with her mistakes, thus creating a healthy foundation for identity development. First, Nel accepts her share of the blame for Chicken Little's murder. For years, she repressed the memory and realization of her guilt and responsibility, considering herself a good person and blaming Sula for what happened. La Vinia Delois Jennings suggests that Nel could not accept that she had an evil aspect of her personality: "Unable to own her evil side, she projects it onto Sula" (2008: 53). For Nel, who perceives the world in binary oppositions, not accepting the idea that there are many layers in the observation of good and evil, it is easier to consider herself good and Sula evil. However, when she pays a visit to Eva in a nursing home, Eva opens her eyes, telling her: "You. Sula. What's the difference? You was there. You watched, didn't you? Me, I never would've watched" (2004: 168). It took some time for Nel to process the information and realize that she and Sula were equally responsible for that unfortunate event. At that point, Nel finally feels ready to admit the truth to herself: "The good feeling she had had when Chicken's hands slipped. She hadn't wondered about that in years. "Why didn't I feel bad when it happened? How come it felt so good to see him fall?"" (Morrison 2004: 170). When Nel accepts her share of responsibility and deals with guilt, she also abandons the belief in the existence of binary concepts of good and evil, perhaps finally understanding Sula's view regarding morality.

Another important realization that Nel makes that aids her on her path toward self-actualization is that she has felt grief and loneliness because she lost Sula, and not because she lost Jude: ""'All that time, all that time, I thought I was missing Jude." And the loss pressed down on her chest and came up into her throat. "We was girls together," she said as though explaining something" (Morrison 2004: 174). Even though it took a long time for Nel to acknowledge it, Nel realizes that her sense of identity was connected to her best friend, their unconditional love, support, and the strong bond that they built and that helped them deal with complex racial, gender and social circumstances surrounding the lives of black people. Carolyn M. Jones draws an analogy between Sethe and Nel by saying: "Like Sethe at the end of *Beloved*, Nel finds that her story is bound with the story of another, and that connection, which transcends death, becomes the path to finding her identity" (1999: 146). It seems that Morrison reiterates the idea she tackled in *The Bluest Eye*, that people cannot surpass traumas alone; the presence of the community or other people is essential.

In the analysis of Nel's character, the impression remains that Nel is the perfect representative of a black woman in the 1940s. As noted by Stephanie A. Demetrakopoulos, "She is Everywoman. The repression of parts of self is, however, even more intense in Nel's case since she carries the additional burden of shadow that white culture projects onto Black people" (1999: 79). Nel is obedient, quiet, follows all the patriarchal expectations and adheres to all the moral laws without complaint, although that requires a great deal of repression of personal feelings and desires. Additionally, even though she is supported and accepted by the black community for being a perfect community member who faithfully follows patriarchal rules, she lacks romantic love and a sense of purpose, especially when her husband leaves her. Morrison explains why she likes women like Nel: "Nel is the kind of person I like because I like people who 'do it.' No matter what happens, they do what they have to do" ("Complexity"

1994: 62). Nel is aware of the responsibility she has toward her family, and she never fails to ensure that they have everything that they need. She is indeed the example of the perfect wife and mother in the 1940s. Still, as Morrison emphasizes: "Nobody ever thinks about these people. So they just sit on busses and carry the weight of the world forever" ("Complexity" 1994: 62). As evidenced in the novel, Nel has no one to rely on and share her worries with, so it seems that she is actually more isolated than Sula is, even though people surround her. Unlike Sula, who chooses her loneliness, Nel is forced to deal with it, and this imposed isolation makes her path toward individuation even more challenging.

4.3.5 Helene Wright

Helene Wright, Nel's mother, stands as an example of what the black community in the Bottom considers to be the perfect woman who fulfills all the patriarchal obligations. Helene's surname – Wright – coincides with Helene's attempts always to do what is morally right and acceptable in society at the expense of her personal happiness. Doreatha Drummond Mbalia explains the meaning of the surname: "To be right (Wright) means to follow the path that has been laid out for you by society; to be at peace is to be left alone to pursue whatever path you wish" (1991: 44). While Helene perfectly fulfills the role ascribed to her by society and by the surname she carries, she does not seem to have the luxury of living a happy life and making her own decisions. Therefore, Morrison's choice of this surname is ironic, as something that is considered to be "right" by the majority (in this case, the black community) does not necessarily mean it would be correct and suitable for everyone.

Adhering to all the traditional expectations means that Helene is a valued member of the black community, respected for her qualities that are appreciated in a black woman. Patrick Bryce Bjork sees Helene's qualities in the following way: "The apparent irony in the narrator's description of Helene reinforces her rigidity. That Helene is respected indicates that she is correctly playing the role ascribed to all women by the community" (1994: 60). The level of respect toward women in the Bottom is apparently measured by the willingness of women to conform to social norms and patriarchal roles.

When it comes to Helene's background and origin, Elliott Butler-Evans mentions that Morrison uses ellipsis when discussing Helene's past, not offering all the details: "For example, the reader is provided with a somewhat fragmentary sketch of the background of Helene Wright and must construct a narrative of his or her own to flesh out the spaces" (1989: 82). Helene Wright's family originates from New Orleans, and her mother was a prostitute, so Helene was raised by her grandmother. When she married a seaman and gave birth to Nel, she decided to raise Nel according to her convictions of what a prim and proper woman should be. As she never kept in touch with her mother and did not even introduce her family to her, the impression remains that Helene, by running as far away as she could from the lifestyle her mother had, reached another extreme by living the righteous and socially acceptable life and passing it down to her daughter.

Nevertheless, Nel, Helene's daughter who blindly listened to her mother about everything, dramatically changed her opinion of Helene when they went to visit Helene's family in order to see Helene's grandmother, who was critically ill. When they boarded the train, Helene accidentally entered the carriage designated for white people only. On her way to the one for colored people, the white conductor addressed Helene: "What you think you doin', gal?" (Morrison 2004: 20). By hearing the word "gal" which is a derogatory word for a black woman, and by noticing the conductor's condescending attitude, Helene was reminded of her past as revealed by her thoughts and physical reaction to the incident: "All the old vulnerabilities, all the old fears of being somehow flawed gathered in her stomach and made

her hands tremble" (Morrison 2004: 20). Helene, who got used to being a respected member of the black community was shocked by the white conductor's behavior who showed no respect toward her; she was astonished that no one assisted them with their luggage; she was appalled by subtle instances of racism such as the non-existence of a restroom for the colored people. By unintentionally breaking the segregation law, being addressed as a "gal," and being made aware of her lower status in society, Helene becomes aware of her racial identity. Patricia McKee sheds light on the implications of such a realization for Helene: "On the train south, she feels herself losing her place as Helene Wright and slipping into an identity with her mother, the whore. Then she sees herself losing her place in men's eyes" (1999: 153). For Helene, coming to terms with her racial identity and accepting the reality of segregation laws, racist discriminatory practices, and the ways in which white people perceived black people meant lowering her personality to the same low level that she considers her mother to be. This is something that Helene worked so desperately to run away from, which reveals the white gaze's power over her and internalized racism that she feels.

On their trip, both Helene and Nel can see that Helene is not protected from racism, even though she is religious, wears appropriate clothes, speaks eloquently, and follows all patriarchal rules. Her smile at the conductor shows her desire to avoid scandal and to please him, but in this way, she also accepts his racist attitude. At this moment, Nel realizes that her mother appears to be in control of everything but that she is not as strong and dominant as she seems. Helene also displays internalized racism in her relationship with her daughter; she does not like Nel's features typical of black women, such as a broad nose and lips, and she keeps requesting Nel to pull her nose, hoping the shape can be changed in this way. Additionally, Helene feels very ashamed of her background and origin. Helene deliberately forgets her native language, never visits her family, and never talks about her past to anyone. What is even more significant is that she does not teach her daughter about their culture and background; she does not want Nel to know about her family or how to speak Creole, depriving her of essential aspects when it comes to identity construction. In connection with the rejection of relevant aspects of one's identity, Teresa Brennan makes an important observation: "To maintain a separate identity, one has to define oneself against the other" (1989: 11). For Helene, in order to present herself as a respectable black woman who adheres to traditions and moral laws, she feels obliged to forget and repress all the elements of her past that she feels ashamed of. However, as Brennan warns, this action "threatens identity" (1989: 11), which is why Helene cannot reach healthy self-actualization and, even worse, why she endangers her daughter's path toward individuation.

As Nel witnesses the breaking up of her mother's controlling, rigid façade, she comes to the realization that she is an independent individual who does not want to follow in her mother's footsteps. Marianne Hirsch adequately explained Nel's thoughts: "Nel's image of her mother as formless custard barely contained by her heavy velvet dress, makes it imperative that she identify herself as separate, different from her maternal heritage, as a very definite "me."" (1993: 264). Despite the fact that Nel did go on to have a similar lifestyle to her mother in terms of patriarchal obligations, this realization was a turning point in Nel's life when it came to her identity development. It gave her the courage to start socializing with Sula, who turned out to be one of the most important and influential people in her life.

When it comes to the analysis of Helene's identity construction, Carmen Gillespie brings a fresh perspective:

> Although it would not have been proper, Helene probably would have found more love and pleasure in the easygoing arms of her mother than she did in the strict embrace of her grandmother. This possibility illustrates another theme in

> *Sula*, the idea that what is thought of as right and proper behavior can be arbitrary and may not necessarily be the best course of action (2008: 199).

Helene's rigid demeanor stems from the strict upbringing that her grandmother thought was necessary as she probably wanted her granddaughter to be different from her daughter. However, just because this seemed like the best way to raise her granddaughter does not mean it was the right way, as Helene grew up into a controlling woman obsessed with living her life in a morally acceptable way and intent on passing her beliefs to her daughter.

When it comes to Peace and Wright households, it is evident that their families are very different when it comes to the general lifestyle, opinions, and upbringing of children. Still, despite their differences, Patricia McKee observes some similarities between Eva and Hannah: "Both women are primarily occupied, then, with controlling, or even patrolling, boundaries so as to control the definition of their own selves. Both mark off the self through representations that rule out certain parts of their experience" (1999: 156). Both Eva and Helene believe they are entitled to control their children's lives; Eva by murdering her son, and Helene by influencing Nel to fulfill her patriarchal role by getting married and having children. Additionally, in their attempt to meet traditional expectations themselves, they are forced to suppress certain aspects of their personality; Helene by forgetting about her past, and Eva by forgetting about her husband.

All in all, Helene Wright is a complex character who, on her path toward individuation, makes many mistakes, and without owning or accepting them, she passes them down to her daughter. Helene is a perfect paragon of virtue and morality according to the standards of the black community in the Bottom. Even though she seems perfectly satisfied with her life, readers witness many of her insecurities resulting from internalized racism and her shame about her background and origin. Most importantly, Helene's insistence on adhering to all the social and traditional norms threatens her daughter's identity development.

4.4 Themes that form problematic narratives surrounding female identity

4.4.1 Family and motherhood

The identity development of female characters is tightly connected with the families they grew up in and the relationships between mothers and daughters that are very important yet deeply troubled and traumatized. By presenting two very different households, the Peace family and the Wright family, Morrison depicts how different families deal with the upbringing of children in a racist society fraught with discriminatory practices, financial difficulties, and patriarchal rules and how family dynamics might have a crucial role in children's identity construction. Three generations of families, and especially women, are presented in the novel, highlighting the importance of family in character development.

The matriarchal Peace household challenges the traditional idea of what a family should consist of that necessarily includes a male figure. Since Eva's husband abandoned her, she was forced to take over the patriarchal role of men and become the head of the household. However, even though it seems that Nel's household is traditionally organized with both parents, Nel's father was frequently absent, and therefore Nel was primarily raised by her mother. Andrea O'Reilly sheds light on Morrison's portrayal of unconventional families: "Morrison is often read as a critic of the traditional nuclear family: namely, a familial structure composed of a mother and a father and their biological children in which the husband's role is to be the provider while the wife is to be the "at home" nurturer" (2004: 25). By writing about untraditional families Morrison wishes to emphasize that traditional idea of a family is rarely

available to black people. As illustrated in the novel, men often abandoned women, Eva's husband left her, and Jude left Nel, forcing the women to become sole caretakers and breadwinners in their households. Still, Eva and Nel did not wish for their marriages to end the way they did, and if they could choose, it seems that they would still perform their patriarchal roles. However, growing up in such a matriarchal social structure also affected Sula, who learned how to be empowered by her independence.

When it comes to unconventional families in the novel, Denise Heinze points to their powerful portrayal: "So unusual, so compelling, are Morrison's fictional families, they serve to effectively challenge one of America's most cherished institutions" (1993: 56). By depicting broken homes, single parents, matriarchal families, Morrison also evokes white people's share of responsibility that black people were often deprived of traditional families by discriminating against them along racial, economic and financial lines. Heinze further adds: "For Morrison, it appears the nuclear family, in general, doesn't work in the context of patriarchy/capitalism; specifically, it fails for black people, who cannot rely on a racist marketplace to establish the male as provider and head" (1993: 57). The traditional role division between a man as the financial provider for the family and a woman as a housewife who takes care of children, appears very often to be impossible for black people simply due to economic reasons. As demonstrated by Jude, black men often have to do menial jobs to make ends meet since they are unable to obtain better working positions for discriminatory reasons. On the other hand, men like Eva's husband leave their wives without an explanation and never even offer financial aid for children.

Nevertheless, given all the racist, sexist, and economic issues surrounding the complex concept of family, the question remains: why has patriarchy persisted for such a long period of time in the black community? Farah Jasmine Griffin suggests that the answer lies in the long, painful history of exploitation of black women: "[…]the assurance of their safety was a very appealing vision for many black women: It stood in direct opposition to the degrading images that bombarded them on a daily basis and the harsh reality of many of their lives" (2001: 216). After many years of physical and psychological abuse, black women longed for safety and protection, something they believed marriage could give them. Additionally, as illustrated by the mean comments about Sula's engagement with white men, it appears that black women wanted to improve the negative image that black people had of them as they considered them to be promiscuous and immoral. However, Trudier Harris highlights the fact that the Peace women eliminate these prejudices: "Their breaks from expected codes of behavior also enable them to transcend the usual depictions of black women in African-American literature, thereby debunking numerous stereotypes and myths" (1999: 121). The Peace women challenge white people's erroneous and wrong impression of black women by being independent, strong, and financially stable despite unfavorable discriminatory circumstances. Additionally, they challenge black people's opinion that black women cannot be happy unless they follow a previously laid-out patriarchal plan that determines how they should live their lives.

When it comes to the analysis of the interfamilial tensions, Missy Dehn Kubitschek sheds light on the relevant observation: "In the histories of the Peace and Wright households, Morrison presents three generations of women. In each, the traits of the grandmother reappear, with different manifestations, in the granddaughters" (1998: 55). As much as Sula and Nel seem to be disconnected from their grandmothers, Nel, when it comes to physical distance and Sula when it comes to her and Eva's perception of their character traits, it appears that they are pretty similar. Nel feels joyous when she meets her grandmother wishing to spend more time with her. Still, despite her enthusiasm and determination to be different when she returns home to the Bottom, Nel's mother ensures that Nel suppresses these emotions and goes back on track that Helene considers appropriate. When it comes to Sula and Eva, Paula Gallant Eckard comments: "While Hannah occupies a middle and more vulnerable position, Eva and Sula

mirror each other to a frightening degree. Both are strong-willed, independent women who ignore social conventions and act with godlike impunity in the lives of others" (2002: 52). Although it seems unacceptable for Sula and Eva to admit it, the two women resemble each other very closely. Both of them believe that they should live their lives as they please without the need to provide explanations for their actions; both of them defy patriarchal rules by displaying independence from men; and finally, both of them consider morality to be a relative term as both of them commit murders but do not feel guilt over it. Such close resemblance also results in disagreements and intolerance, as Carmen Gillespie mentions:

> Sula puts Eva in a rest home because she feels threatened by her. The two women are independent, strong, and concerned with self-preservation. When they love or hate, they do so fiercely and deeply. The two women are too much alike to live amiably within the same household (2008: 200).

In addition to their similarities, Eva and Sula are both aware of the worst acts they have committed, including the murders of Plum and Chicken Little and sacrificing a body part. Therefore, Sula fears Eva, being aware of the character traits they both share, which is why she does yet another unthinkable thing in the black community – she places her grandmother in the nursing home instead of taking care of her. Still, no matter whether their mothers and grandmothers influence Eva and Sula positively or negatively, Pin-chia Feng considers this influence to be of crucial importance: "The repetition of the maternal discourse sets up an important network of relations as well as limitations for the self-creation of a woman of color, without which, however, she is susceptible to becoming rootless and lost" (1998: 81). Morrison will explore the topic of rootlessness and not belonging in great detail in the novel *Tar Baby,* but she already hints in *Sula* how important heritage is when it comes to female identity development.

With respect to the distinctive features of black mothers, it is worth emphasizing that patriarchy and discrimination that prevailed at the time required different expressions of love and methods of upbringing to those that are usually found in the white culture. bell hooks spells out the unfavorable circumstances that black women had to deal with: "Given that so many black women are the sole providers in black households, as Eva is in *Sula*, it is not surprising that we are often obsessed with material comfort, with finding the means to provide material well-being for ourselves and others" (2015: 149). Considering financial difficulties, economic disenfranchisement, and the absence of men, it is only natural that black mothers prioritized financial security when raising their children. That sometimes means accepting menial jobs as Nel did when Jude left her or making extreme sacrifices as Eva did. With regard to providing financial means to their children, Carmen Gillespie criticizes black women: "Each of the mothers in the text feels that she is doing what is necessary to provide for her child what she needs, and yet none of them succeed in passing on to their daughters what they actually need" (2008: 197). As illustrated in the novel, all the daughters, Hannah, Sula, and Nel, grow up feeling financially secure, but it seems their mother fails to equip them with other means and tools that children need. Hannah grew up wondering whether her mother even loved her; Sula grew up knowing that her mother did not like her; Nel faced difficulties not learning how to deal with the new reality of being a single parent and having to find ways to provide for her children. Still, contrary to Gillespie's comment, Andrea O'Reilly states: "However, for Morrison, keeping children alive through preservative love is an essential and integral dimension of motherwork" (2004: 32). Eva's actions and expressions of love that give primacy to bare survival of her children also demonstrate that motherhood is culturally and historically determined. Even though Hannah asks her mother whether she played with them when they

were children, as she associates playing with love, she fails to notice that Eva's deformed body symbolizes her love for her children. Since Eva is well aware of her enormous sacrifice, she does not consider it necessary to explain herself. Diane Gillespie and Missy Dehn Kubitschek clarify the results of this decision: "To Eva, the knowledge that she made herself live in order that they might live should suffice without softer manifestations of love. Eva bequeaths to Hannah, and Hannah, in turn, bequeaths to Sula, a capacity for emotional distance that allows for the creation for a female self" (1997: 76). Despite the fact that Hannah did not need to go to great lengths to provide for Sula as her mother had to do for her, she inherits emotional distance that she passes on to Sula; consequently, the mother/daughter relationship between Sula and Hannah is cold and distant.

With reference to expressions of love, the most disputed and questionable one is Eva's murder of her son Plum. Eva, who endured so many ordeals for her children, could not accept Plum's addiction and decided to end his life in a dignified way rather than watch him suffer. By saying that "These are not the usual actions of motherhood, but ones that result from the brutalities of poverty and pervasive social distress" (Burrows 2004: 129), Victoria Burrows reiterates how divergent black and white motherhood are due to adverse circumstances. Still, Eva's shocking act naturally disturbs not only the people in her surroundings but readers, as mothers are expected to create life and aid their children through difficulties, not intentionally end life. With regard to this, Andrea O'Reilly defends Eva's act calling it "mercy killing" (2004: 149) and offering her view on the subject: "The murder distressed readers, I will argue, precisely because Eva claims a maternal power that upsets comfortable notions of maternal powerlessness, particularly as such pertains to black women, who are expected to be powerless in a racist and sexist culture" (2004: 119). Eva's act provokes shock and astonishment not only because a mother murdered her own child but also because a black mother did it. Black women have long been considered inferior, weak, and subordinate. Eva exercises her power in the most brutal but arguably most generous way, as her unconditional love for her children drives all her actions. By depicting Eva's actions, Morrison shows that the notion of love is very complex and may force people to do beautiful but also horrible and unthinkable things that cannot constantly be subjected to moral laws.

Another important aspect of the novel worthy of critical attention is the defiance of social conventions and patriarchal roles, notably Sula's insistence not to get married and have children. Growing up in a powerful matriarchal family surrounded by unhappy marriages like Nel's, it is natural that Sula does not consider this patriarchal role particularly important on the road to achieving happiness. Deborah E. McDowell considers Morrison's portrayal of marriage as "death of the female self and imagination" (1988: 82). Sula witnessed Nel's unhappiness in the marriage that she could compare to her liberated lifestyle; Sula was able to obtain an education, travel, broaden her horizons, while Nel was stuck in her patriarchal role of a housewife and mother.

Additionally, by portraying Sula, Morrison emphasizes that there is much more to being a woman than simply being a mother and wife; Marianne Hirsch explicates the idea: "With characters like Sula and later with Jadine in *Tar Baby*, Morrison invents a female character who will not be maternal but will try to get beyond an ideology which identifies woman with nurturing and caretaking" (1989: 183). Despite the fact that Sula did not accomplish the role of a mother and wife, she feels blissfully happy with her lifestyle, illustrating that women can reach self-actualization without fulfilling certain traditional obligations.

Morrison puts particular emphasis on family and motherhood in the novels, demonstrating that these are defining parameters in female characters' development. By depicting two significantly different households, Morrison shows how Sula and Nel feel freedom/obligation to live the lives that they do because of their upbringing. Speaking of the nature of motherhood, Hirsch says: "Inasmuch as the mother is simultaneously a daughter and

a mother, a woman and a mother, in the house and in the world, powerful and powerless, nurturing and nurtured, dependent and depended upon, maternal discourse is necessarily plural, divided" (1993: 270). Mothers in *Sula* all display plurality in their personalities; Helene, who seems to be a rigid, strict mother, carries the burden of racial insecurities and the past she feels ashamed of; Nel, who negates her identity in order to fulfill the patriarchal role finds herself struggling on the road to self-discovery after her husband abandons her; Eva, who represents the most caring and cruelest mother in the same individual; Hannah who transfers only the negative aspects of motherhood to her daughter. Ultimately, Morrison shows that in all their flaws, mothers play a crucial role in their daughters' identity development, which entails both negative and positive aspects.

4.4.2 Friendship

Sula is an ode to friendship; it is a novel that illustrates the importance of sisterhood, of women supporting and helping each other through the darkest times, and how friendship might be the solution to overcoming complex racial and social circumstances surrounding the lives of black women. Morrison commented on her dedication of a novel to friendship: "Friendship between women is special, different, and has never been depicted as the major focus of a novel before *Sula*. Nobody ever talked about friendship between women unless it was homosexual, and there is no homosexuality in *Sula*" (qtd in Tally, 2007: 21).

Nel and Sula became best friends as children, drawn together by their similar circumstances and different personalities; both of them did not have a father figure while growing up, and they were both misunderstood by their mothers; each of them longed for something that the other one had, Sula liked the neatness and organization of Nel's house, while Nel appreciated the cozy feeling of Sula's house where there were no strict rules to be followed; both of them aware "that they were neither white nor male, and that all freedom and triumph was forbidden to them" (Morrison 2004: 52). Barbara Christian insightfully described their closeness: "Out of their awareness that their lives, as black females, are restricted by their community and by the outer society, Nel and Sula are drawn to each other. As only-girl children, each takes the other as sister, sharing each other's dreams of freedom and excitement" (1993: 81). The bond between girls is deep and strong and continues despite their differences. Their friendship is precious to them because of the conditions they lived in, they both felt misunderstood and that they could not express themselves freely; Nel because she felt the need to conform to traditional expectations and Sula because she wished to defy them in the most conspicuous ways; both of them felt completely understood and supported only by each other. The accidental death of Chicken Little that they both witnessed and took part in strengthened but also traumatized their friendship and made them feel more mature, as they were obliged to keep a secret between them for the rest of their lives.

In connection with Sula and Nel's divergent characteristics, Morrison offers her view on their differences: "…there was a little bit of both in each of those two women, and that if they had been one person, I suppose they would have been a rather marvelous person. But each one lacked something that the other one had" ("Intimate Things in Place" 1994: 13). If Sula and Nel's character traits were combined and put together, they would probably account for a perfect woman, a fully formed and satisfied identity that could meet both societal expectations and personal longings and wishes. Gillespie also believes that the mixture of these two personalities reveals a recipe for a good life: "A compromise between Nel's dependence and Sula's independence seems to be the novel's suggestion for achieving the right balance for a happy and full life" (2008: 206). Morrison shows that both girls grew up into women who were accomplished in different fields, Nel when it comes to family and Sula when it comes to

education and adventures, however, they both felt they lacked something in life, which is why the combination of their life experiences together would account for a perfectly fulfilled life. Sula and Nel met each other at the time which was crucial for their identity development, in childhood, and they assisted each other on their path toward individuation. Barbara Smith believes that Morrison draws attention to the importance of friendship for identity construction: "Morrison depicts in literature the necessary bonding that has always taken place between Black women for the sake of barest survival. Together the two girls can find the courage to create themselves" (1985: 177). The girls helped each other during the most sensitive years of their lives by creating a safe haven where they supported and defended each other and understood the true meaning of friendship despite the discriminatory practices, economic difficulties, and whom they perceived to be unreasonable parents.

As they grow into young ladies, Nel and Sula develop opposite personalities and go on to live the lives they were expected to lead – Nel ends up in a traditional marriage with children, and Sula lives as an independent woman without following traditions or societal expectations. However, their seemingly unbreakable friendship falls apart when Nel's husband Jude cheats on her with Sula. For Nel, this betrayal is unforgivable: "That was too much. To lose Jude and not have Sula to talk about it because it was Sula that he had left her for" (Morrison 2004: 110). For Nel, losing a husband and losing a best friend are losses that hurt the same. On the other hand, Sula does not participate in adultery to hurt Nel purposefully. In her understanding of their friendship, she and Nel have always shared everything, and there has never been possessiveness in their relationship, so she thought it was natural that they could also share Nel's husband: "She had no thought at all of causing Nel pain when she bedded down with Jude. They had always shared the affection of other people: compared how a boy kissed, what line he used with one and then the other. Marriage, apparently, had changed all that…" (Morrison 2004: 119). Both of them are disappointed in each other, but for different reasons; they see their friendship differently. Sula does not seem to be able to comprehend why Nel cannot forgive her, as she believes that their friendship is strong enough. Nevertheless, their reactions to adultery also point to their different personalities and show that what one is willing and capable of enduring and forgiving is subjective and relative. As Toni Morrison shrewdly concludes: "What one puts up with in a friendship is determined by the emotional value of the relationship" (2019: 274). In the same way, what one can do to another in a friendship shows the emotional value of the friendship; evidently, Nel and Sula have not viewed their sisterhood in the same way.

Sula and Jude's affair brought an end to Nel and Sula's friendship and Nel and Jude's marriage, but it also revealed that Nel has not fully supported Sula's lifestyle as the image of their friendship would suggest. Nel's view of Sula's life coincided with the opinion of the black community. She disapproved of it, but it seems it only started bothering her when it affected her life.

However, in their discussion on morality, Sula questions Nel's binary and limited understanding of "good" and "evil" by insisting that these are relative terms. As La Vinia Delois Jennings states: "Furthermore, Sula's idea of the concept of goodness is unfixed since acts of good and evil are an inescapable part of human nature and, therefore, of her own personality as well as Nel's. One may be deemed good, or evil, as easily and legitimately as the next person" (2008: 52). Despite Nel's unwillingness to accept the "evil" aspect of her personality, Nel and Sula's actions, as well as the actions of other female characters in the novel, illustrate that no one can be purely good or evil, that these categories are not exclusive and that they complement each other in each female character.

Finally, it took many years of not speaking to each other and Sula's death for Nel to eventually forgive Sula, to realize that she misses Sula more than her husband, and to admit the importance of their friendship for her identity development. As Morrison wisely said: "The

women forgive each other – or learn to" (2019: 341). It is evident in Sula's final thoughts that were directed at Nel and Nel's immense pain when Sula passes away that their friendship played a significant part in their journey toward individuation. However, Terry Otten emphasizes that neither of the women finds happiness: "Nel suffers because she accepts all claims of the community on her; Sula suffers because she accepts none. Either way leads to tragic choice" (1989: 43). Both Nel and Sula desperately make an effort to live their lives in the ways they think is best: Nel by conforming to patriarchal expectations and Sula by spitefully defying them. However, while they have their friendship as a safe place to turn to, they seem happy and fulfilled. Pin-chia Feng mentions the consequence of the ending of their friendship: "The rupture of their friendship leaves both Nel's and Sula's developmental narratives incomplete" (1998: 80). Despite the fact that their identity quest remains fragmented, at the end of the novel both women learn and acknowledge the importance of female friendship.

By depicting such a unique and complicated friendship, Morrison illustrates that female friendship can both nurture and threaten female identity. Through Sula and Nel's relationship, Morrison describes many elements that the relationship between women (familial or friendly) comprises, such as secrets, betrayal, reconciliation, and forgiveness. Morrison also emphasizes the significance of female friendship that should not be taken for granted:

> I think that is because my mode of writing is sublimely didactic in the sense that I can only warn by taking something away. What I really wanted to say about the friendship between Nel and Sula was that if you really do have a friend, a real other, another person that complements your life, you should stay with him or her. And to show how valuable that was, I showed a picture of what life is without that person, no matter how awful that person might have treated you ("The One out of Sequence" 1994: 74).

Morrison suggests that the presence of other people in one's life is of paramount importance when it comes to identity development. She emphasizes that these people sometimes make mistakes and cause pain, but that does not mean that one should bear a grudge against them infinitely because, in the long run, they might cause themselves even more pain, as demonstrated by Nel's refusal to forgive Sula and thus depriving herself of the most meaningful friendship she has ever had, and all because of an unfaithful man who abandoned her and their children.

4.4.3 Women and men

When it comes to male characters in *Sula* and their impact on women regarding their identity development, the general impression is that men are either absent or fall short of women's expectations. Most men in the novel abandon women and leave them alone to take care of households and children. Eva's husband left her, Jude left Nel, Ajax left Sula, and although these men abandoned their partners for different reasons, their absence has left a significant mark on women's lives and forced them to take over the patriarchal role of men and thus defy traditional expectations. All male characters in Sula seem to suffer identity crises, either because of the war, racism, social status, etc. For example, Jude was a victim of discrimination and was denied the job he wanted due to racism. Because of this, he decided to get married, believing marriage could cure his insecurities and feelings of inadequacy. Therefore, Jude looked for empathy, comfort, and support in a woman hoping this could substitute for being racially discriminated against. Philip Page describes Jude's reasons for

starting a family with Nel: "His choice of Nel is a displacement, a vain attempt to replace his mother, to replace his own absent identity" (1999: 192). As Jude himself does not feel content with his life, it is no wonder that he is not able to make Nel happy, that he is unable himself to feel happy, and that, consequently, he leaves her. Page further comments that he believes the main reason is the inferior social status resulting from racism: "The males in *Sula*, displaced by their inferior racial status, never achieve stable selfhood" (1999: 192). Discriminatory practices disable men from finding well-paid jobs and thus from being financial providers of their households. This failure to perform their patriarchal role severely affects men instilling in them feelings of inferiority and inadequacy.

Regarding Eva's relationship with men, it seems that all men in her life disappointed her; her husband when he abandoned her alone with children and her son when he sank into addiction after the war. However, unlike Nel, Eva takes her life into her own hands and finds a way to provide for her children, never allowing herself to dwell in pain and feel depressed over what had happened. Still, Morrison demonstrates that male-female dynamics have changed even though women still live in a male-dominated society. Unlike before, when men could not protect women as slavery and historical circumstances deprived them of any power in a white society, men now consciously decide to abandon women. Apart from Nel's father, men are not protectors and providers of families in *Sula;* women take over these roles. Additionally, Morrison shows that women sometimes suppress men's identities, such as Eva, who treats the Deweys the same, giving them identical names, which is why they start losing distinctive features of their identities and becoming the same.

When discussing Sula's relationship with Ajax, what started as a casual relationship turned into something entirely different for both Sula and Ajax; initially, they were both drawn to each other because they were unique in their defiance of patriarchal expectations. Morrison explains why Sula fell in love with him: "He was a man who was not intimidated by her; he was interested in her. He treated her as a whole person, not as an extension of himself, not as a vessel, not as a symbol" ("Intimate Things in Place," 1994: 18). However, it seemed as if the freedom that Ajax offered to Sula had awakened the patriarchal tendencies that she was not aware were part of her personality and she wanted to keep him only for her. Ajax felt stressed and pressured by traditional expectations, so he left Sula in an attempt to avoid them.

When it comes to the critical factors that influence male characters' identities in *Sula,* Morrison pays special attention to the damaging effect of war. Shadrack, deeply traumatized by the war experience, sympathizes with Sula because he sees the fear and trauma instilled in her, and he remembers that he felt the same way when he first encountered death. He tried to comfort her: "So he had said "always," so she would not have to be afraid of the change – the falling away of skin, the drip and slide of blood, and the exposure of bone underneath. He had said "always" to convince her, assure her, of permanency" (Morrison 2004: 157). Although Shadrack was not sure what Sula needed to hear from him, the word that he uttered provided comfort and support to her. By portraying the characters of Shadrack and Plum, Morrison not only shows the physical and psychological consequences of war but also illustrates the small amount of understanding and sympathy that the black community has for former soldiers and war victims. J. Brooks Bouson mentions the everlasting problem of racism as traumatizing war experience "…repeat and telescope the historical traumas visited on African-American men in a racist society where black men are sent to fight white wars in Europe only to return home to a climate of pervasive racial oppression" (1994: 50). Despite the fact that black men took part in wars to represent the United States of America, they have never been given credit for it, and they suffered the same amount of racial discrimination upon their return from war.

Another point worthy of critical attention is the adoption of the "male gaze" in men's perception of female characters. The majority of the men in the novel, except Ajax and Shadrack, adopt the male gaze when they describe Sula as immoral and criticize her for

subverting the patriarchal system by refusing to fulfill the traditional roles determined for women by social conventions. It can be argued that Jude adopts the male gaze in his view of his wife, as he only values Nel as a housewife and mother of their children, refusing to see her past these patriarchal designations. These instances of the male gaze prove to be harmful to female characters' journeys toward self-discovery, as the women's reactions to them (Nel succumbs to patriarchal expectations even more, and Sula becomes more determined to defy them) show that they influence them.

Upon analysis of male-female relationships, it appears clear that most of these relationships are temporary, mainly because men leave women for a variety of reasons, such as racist discrimination, lack of economic opportunities, financial difficulties, and demanding patriarchal roles, which force women to take over the role of a provider within the family. However, even though men are mostly absent from the novel, Patrick Bryce Bjork believes that their absence can reveal a lot about the position of women in the society: "Ironically, their very absence serves to accentuate their unrelenting power because on the few occasions when they do surface, it is to deny presence to the female and to remind her that she is subservient to their Look in a patriarchal society" (1994: 49). Despite their many flaws and the cruel treatment that women have received from them, men appear to be in control and to make the crucial decisions in their relationships with women; Jude leaves Nel even though he was the one who cheated on her, while she mourns for him; when Eva's husband finally pays a visit to her, she is perfectly still and calm, without any judgement or reprehension that he left her and children in extremely poor circumstances; Sula blames herself for the failure of her relationship with Ajax because of the painful realization that she did not even know his full name. The conclusion can be drawn that, no matter if they are present or absent, men influence the identity development of female characters to a large extent, and Morrison seems to criticize women's dependence on them, suggesting that women should learn to be self-sufficient as the novel suggests that male presence is women's life is usually temporary.

4.4.4 Community

As Morrison reiterates in all the novels discussed in this dissertation, close-knit black communities are of considerable importance when the identity development of female characters is analyzed. K. Zauditu-Selassie emphasizes that this belief in the importance of community is deeply ingrained in African history: "From an African perspective, individuals are born into communities and derive their identities from these communities, which inscribe their sense of values, notions of cultural decorum, and ideas of accountability" (2009: 50). Therefore, the black community and individuals are inextricably linked which means that they depend on each other, support and help each other, but also criticize and make comments, especially when morality is concerned. Zauditu-Selassie further adds: "Throughout the novel the community functions as a barometer that gauges the moral actions of Sula, as well as other characters" (2009: 50). The community of the Bottom accepts all of its members, even Shadrack and Sula, whose actions they disapprove of and who are the talk of the town, but they are allowed to live normally, no one does any harm to them, even though the community considers it natural to morally question their actions and gossip about them. Morrison explains that the reason for this lies in black people's opinions on evil: "Black people never annihilate evil. They don't run it out of their neighborhoods, chop it up, or burn it up. They don't have witch hangings. They accept it" ("Conversations with Alice Childress and Toni Morrison" 1994: 8). In the same manner as they accept the necessary evil, they accept Sula and all her actions. On a positive note, the black community is always there for its members in their hour of need; when Eva was struggling financially, she left her children with a neighbor for over a

year, and when she came back, she found her children well taken care of and no words of reprehension.

The black community strongly influences the identity development of all female characters, especially young girls Nel and Sula, who develop different attitudes toward it: Nel wishes to fulfill all their expectations regarding what a good black woman should do, while Sula wishes to contradict them. Julie Cary Nerad discovers the effects of the community on the girls' personalities: "The novel thus explores the communal forces that shape and limit Nel and Sula's identities and the psychological consequences of the rift in their friendship" (2006: 638). Nerad brings an essential fact to the fore – that the community significantly impacts personal relationships, such as friendships. As she grows older, Nel takes on the popular opinion of the black population and starts resenting Sula for her independent lifestyle.

Unlike Nel, who conforms to the community's patriarchal expectations, Sula has a very complex relationship with the black community in the Bottom, simultaneously wishing to run away from them and feeling drawn to come back. When Sula comes back to the Bottom as a changed woman who really stands out with her independence, negligence of patriarchal roles and communal expectations, and especially defiance of unwritten moral laws, the community considers her to be evil and bring bad luck. However, as much as it is not easy for the black people of the Bottom to admit it, they need Sula, and her apparent evilness helps them forget about the racist trauma and discriminatory practices they experience daily and inspires them to do good deeds. As Barbara Christian notes: "Rather than focusing its attentions on the pervasive evils of racism and poverty that continually threaten it, the community expends its energy on outlasting the evil Sula" (1985: 50). Nevertheless, Sula profoundly affects their behavior and opinions as the community's appalling attitudes at Sula's outrageous behavior motivates them to become better and nicer toward one another, as the community believes in "counteracting her negative evil with positive goodness" (Jennings 2008: 40). Therefore, Sula actually improves the lives of the community as they start treating each other with love and respect, and take better care of their children, husbands, and wives; what they perceived as Sula's evilness gave them a sense of collective identity.

Carmel Gillespie explains one of the possible explanations and reasons why the black community condemns Sula and labels her as evil: "The community needs to objectify evil and, as one who does not conform to their ideals of normalcy, Sula becomes the personification of all that is bad and wrong" (2008: 191). Unable to fight against the real evils of the world that bother them, such as racism, discrimination, and poverty, the black community transfers their feelings of hatred and disapproval to Sula, as it is easier for them to consider Sula as the source of all the problems than focus on the real ones. Additionally, traditional African beliefs and superstitions play an important part in black people's way of life. La Vinia Delois Jennings sheds light on this important tradition of black people: "Sula's neighbors think in very African traditional ways. In traditional belief accidents do not happen. All misfortunes have assignable agency" (2008: 45). Therefore, black people do not fail to notice a series of things that happen that can be described as bad luck, after Sula's return: a plague of robins accompanies Sula back into town; when a boy came to her house, he fell and hurt himself; when a man looked at Sula he choked and died; people believed Sula did not have diseases and that she did not age. All of these occurrences convinced the black people that Sula was connected with something paranormal and possibly evil.

In the discussion of the black community's negative feelings toward Sula, Barbara Christian compares Sula to Pecola: "They are women who become scapegoats in their communities" (1985: 26); the communities blame them for all the bad things that befall them, and they transfer to them all the negative feelings they feel about themselves and others. Christian further says: "Pecola's madness makes everyone feel sane. Sula's evilness highlights

everyone's goodness" (1985: 26). By commenting on what they perceive to be the negative traits, the members of the black community feel better about themselves.

Missy Dehn Kubitschek draws attention to another reason why Sula bothers the community: "Sula threatens the Bottom by exposing the weaknesses of its social institutions" (1998: 69). By getting involved with a married man, Sula demonstrates the disregard that some community members show for the institution of marriage and challenges the high moral standards of the society. Still, the main reason for the black community's intolerance of Sula is the fact that she was involved in romantic relationships with white men. As Rita A. Bergenholtz elucidates: "[…] according to most of the residents of the Bottom, the worst thing a black woman like Sula can do is to sleep with a white man" (1999: 6). In society where black people vividly remember the atrocities dating from the period of slavery, the black community condemns Sula for voluntarily sleeping with white men, as black women were raped and abused by them for such a long period. In the eyes of the black population, this sin is unforgivable and cannot be justified. When it comes to the significance of collective trauma such as the one that black people experienced, Shawan M. Worsley elaborates: "The group's consistent reinterpretation and re-presentation of its collective memory of the event is motivated by future generations' recollection of trauma and the fact that these generations are consistently associated with and identified by it" (2010: 5). Due to all the atrocities that the black people have suffered through and the fact that the white people still exercise racist discrimination in the Bottom, the black community is shocked and disappointed that Sula, as a member of the future generation, does not show respect toward the traumatized community that she is a part of. Through her involvement with white men, Sula awakens a stronger racial identity within the Bottom inhabitants.

Probably the main reason why Sula attracts so much attention and becomes the main storyline for gossip is that she is different from most community members. Barbara Christian believes that this difference makes Sula the object of hateful comments: "What is it about Sula Peace that turns this community into a buttressed fort against her? The reasons are not so much explanation as intersecting circles of fear, the greatest one being the fear of difference" (1993: 85). Given their history, it is entirely natural that black people feel afraid of the unknown and different; it was the white people who used superficial difference such as the skin color as justification to impose so much pain on them. Therefore, it only seems logical that the black community is afraid of Sula as she displays qualities that are fundamentally different from theirs. Susheila Nasta explains how Sula's independence offends the black community: "In countries with a history of colonialism, women's quest for emancipation, self-identity and fulfillment can be seen to represent a traitorous act, a betrayal not simply of traditional codes of practice and belief but of the wider struggle for liberation and nationalism" (1991: xv). After so many struggles of black people, the majority of the black population does not appreciate women's wishes for independence and negligence of patriarchal roles and traditions. Additionally, as Melvin Dixon mentions: "How members of the community *read* Sula tells us a great deal about their relation to the land, to themselves, and to the meaning they create" (2005: 32). People in the Bottom do not even know anything about the adult Sula, she is an enigmatic character to them, but everyone has an opinion about her. Still, precisely because they are unable to understand her, Trudier Harris suggests that "…they label her difference as witchery and thereby justify shunning her" (1999: 114). The fact that they consider her difference as something negative and evil shows how the black community might react to anything or anyone different from the ordinary. Apart from that, it is noteworthy that Sula never confirms any rumors spreading about her. As Harris mentions, Sula chooses to be quiet: "Not interested in fighting back, her very silence gives truth to the rumors as far as the women are concerned. And indeed, they do not really need justification for the tales they tell; rumor exists

for its own satisfaction" (1991: 63). Sula does not confute the gossip, probably aware that her denial will not mean much, as people believe in rumors would still continue to do so.

Nevertheless, despite all the criticism and unfavorable opinions of the black community of Sula and Shadrack, they do not harm them in any way and allow them to live freely in the Bottom. Beverley Foulks suggests that the black community even tolerates the potentially dangerous Shadrack: "Although they recognize that he is insane, they do not seek to institutionalize him or further marginalize him. He becomes a powerful prophetic figure" (2006: 14). The Bottom indeed welcomes everyone despite the community members' disapproval of lifestyles of some of the people living there.

Nonetheless, despite their differences, Sula and the black community of the Bottom need one another. After leaving the town, getting an education, and experiencing adventures, Sula decides to come back, realizing that her identity is closely connected to the place where she grew up in. Trudier Harris gives an in-depth explanation of the unbreakable connection between Sula and the community:

> Her wanderings away from the Bottom can only bring her full circle, like Eva, back to it, for it is able to absorb if not to condone her "otherness," and it gives her the identity that locks her both inside and outside the community's folk traditions. People in the community grant to her the power she has, and she accommodates them by living out their fantasies of otherness (1999: 109).

Like Eva, Sula returns to the Bottom, obviously not minding the criticism and gossip, perhaps even enjoying them as they contribute to creating the mysterious personality that she exerts. Sula may have lacked and missed the power the community's rumors give her as people did not know her outside of the Bottom, and communities are not as close and connected in larger cities. However, it is only after Sula's death that it becomes apparent that the community needs her too. As Carolyn M. Jones observes: "Medallion is only a community when it has Sula for a center, when her "evil" draws its members together in fear" (1999: 144). After Sula died, the people returned to their old ways, they did not take care of each other, and they did not show love or care; living in Sula's vicinity was considered to be evil; the community members wanted to do good things, but now that she is gone, they seem to have lost merits of the right and wrong behavior.

Consequently, the members of the Bottom community (more than ever before) participated in the celebration of National Suicide Day, and they started vandalizing the tunnel construction site because they felt outraged that jobs were denied to black people again. Unfortunately, they die in a terrible accident. Terry Otten sees the death of black people as the metaphor for their spiritual death: "Bottom is destroyed from within, a paradise already ruined by self-possessiveness and moral certainty. The tunnel becomes a communal womb, a perverse symbol of aborted life. Suggestively, it is also a tunnel constructed by whites" (1989: 41). The novel begins and ends with white presence; even though white people are not present physically, they seem to impede the lives of black people; at the beginning of the novel by tricking them into accepting the worst land and at the end by taking over the black people's territory and constructing the tunnel that murders a lot of black people. However, Otten suggests that it was the black people's fault that they died, as they were already dying metaphorically by being stuck in their insistence on patriarchal rules and a limited perspective on morality.

At the end of the novel, Nel admits that she misses Sula, and while the Bottom's occupants do not admit it verbally, they do so with their actions. Patricia McKee explains Sula's importance for the Bottom: "To miss Sula is to recognize her occupation in and of the Bottom:

what she did there and how she was a necessary part of the place, not only as a presence but because she took the place of absence" (1999: 150). In addition to helping the community to treat each other in a better way, Sula also compensated for the absence of financial means, economic opportunities, and racial equality; by concentrating on Sula and her evil ways, the community, at least temporarily, forgot all about the major issues that colored their lives.

4.5 From victimization to empowerment

Sula portrays the process of self-actualization of two girls, following their life journeys to old age/death and demonstrating how different factors may influence girls' identity development in two completely different ways. In the period of growing up, both girls experience the presence of inherited racist trauma, growing up in matriarchal families with absentee fathers and feelings of being misunderstood. Their friendship comforts the girls, and it strengthens over the years as they share secrets. However, despite many of their similarities, the girls respond to social conventions and patriarchal expectations in different manners; Sula does not conform to traditions, while Nel feels obliged to fulfill the patriarchal roles, or as Barbara Smith states: "Nel falls prey to convention while Sula escapes it" (1985: 177).

Sula is a complex novel as it challenges both readers and the characters in the novel to question their assumptions about love, freedom, and morality. Karmen Carmean vividly described the novel's gist:

> *Sula* insists that readers put aside conventional expectations to enter a fictional world deliberately inverted to reveal a complex reality, a world in which evil may be a necessary good, where good may be exposed for its inherent evil, where murder and self-mutilation become acts of love, and where simple answers to ordinary human problems do not exist (1999: 149).

By depicting independent, defiant Sula and law-abiding, moral Nel, Morrison explores isolation and connection; black women are often alone, without their partners to protect them and provide for them, and without the support of the community, but they are still tightly connected to both men and the community, and they are unable to live their lives independently of them. Morrison also portrays the beauty and importance of friendship, as it proves to be a steady relationship that outlasts other familial and communal relationships displayed in the novel.

Furthermore, Morrison explores mother-daughter relationships that are "irreversibly damaged by the racism and poverty crucial to the implementation of slavery in the United Stated" (Burrows 2004: 10), as these significantly influence female characters' identity construction. Hannah's poor motherhood skills and promiscuity probably result from her belief that her mother did not love her as she did not play with her; Sula's fierce independence and insistence not to start a family could be traced to her mother's words that she did not like her; and Eva believed that her sacrifices for her children entitled her to control and even end their lives. All these actions testify to the significance of social and racial circumstances to mother/daughter relationships and how, consequently, these relationships influence both mothers and daughters on their journeys to self-discovery.

Morrison criticizes the limited view on morality in her portrayal of characters' actions that can be ambiguously defined as good or bad. Deborah E. McDowell observes: "The narrative is neither an apology for Sula's destruction nor an unsympathetic critique of Nel's smug conformity. It does not reduce a complex set of dynamics to a simple opposition or choice

between two "pure" alternatives" (1988: 86). The novel does not serve as a moral guide, and it does not determine that specific actions are good or bad; therefore, the reader might feel sympathy toward Eva when she murders her son, or Sula when she accidentally kills Chicken Little or observes her mother burn to death. In this way, Morrison suggests that good and evil are not binary oppositions but necessary components of every character in the novel.

Despite the fact that there are no white characters in the novel, Morrison incorporates the presence of white people from the very onset of the novel: the joke that starts the novel determines the racial relations in the novel. As Rita A. Bergenholtz shrewdly observes: "This brief look at the "nigger joke" which introduces *Sula* – and serves as an emblem for it – highlights a number of binary oppositions that are interrogated throughout the text: black/white, good/evil, tragic/comic, spiritual/material, literal/metaphoric, real/fantastic, and free/enslaved" (1999: 6). White people's discriminatory practices are based on binary oppositions, and the novel shows their impact on black people's identity development; Jude is unable to find a job as he is racially discriminated against' which motivates him to marry Nel for wrong reasons; Sula is condemned by the black community for socializing with white people; Nel's mother feels disgraced because of white conductor's behavior toward her, etc. Even though not prominently depicted in the novel, Black people's actions affect characters by causing feelings of insecurity and inadequacy and awakening internalized racism.

Sula's complicated relationship with the community reveals that both Sula and the black community of the Bottom need one another. Even though Sula left the town in order to pursue an independent lifestyle free from all patriarchal and social constraints, she comes back to the Bottom and permanently stays there, despite the negative criticism. On the other hand, the Bottom finds Sula's lack of morality inspiring as they begin treating each other respectfully and lovingly. Josie Brown-Rose suggests that "[…] Sula helps to empower the community around her. Morrison demonstrates the effectiveness of the black female to uplift and transform her community" (2006: 70). Perhaps Morrison wishes to suggest that the black community needs more self-sufficient women who defy tradition and patriarchy in order to overcome racial tensions and build a stronger collective identity that would consequently help black women on their path toward individuation.

5 *Tar Baby*

5.1 General Introduction to *Tar Baby*

Tar Baby, published in 1981, explores the search for authenticity amid complex social dynamics, racial divisions, and traumatized familial relationships. The novel represents the characters' quest for self-definition by facing cultural, racial, and historical obstacles while combating violence and abuse. Toni Morrison adds unique elements to the novel by including white people, together with black people, as the central characters in the novel. Additionally, Morrison depicts the evolution of black females by describing a beautiful, independent, educated black woman Jadine who defies racial and social stereotypes associated with black women. By portraying Jadine's inner struggles regarding identity development, Morrison draws attention to the importance of appreciation and respect for one's heritage and tradition.

The novel is organized into numerical chapters and presents the plot chronologically. It starts by depicting an unidentified man who comes to a small island called Isle des Chevaliers and hides in a house called L'Arbe de la Croix. The house's owner is a wealthy white man Valerian Street who lives there with his wife Margaret and black servants Ondine and Sydney. Jadine Childs, Ondine and Sydney's niece, and Valerian's protégé, has come to celebrate Christmas with her family and the Streets. Jadine lives in Paris, where she works as a fashion model and studies art history at Sorbonne University.

The marriage between Margaret and Valerian is fraught with arguments and verbal fights. One of the arguments is caused by Margaret's decision to invite their son Michael to spend Christmas with them, as Valerian firmly believes Michael will not make an appearance. After their disagreement, Margaret goes to her room, where she discovers a black man hiding in her closet. All the household members feel frightened of the mysterious man, apart from Valerian, who invites the man called Son to stay for dinner and spend the night in the house.

The next day Jadine receives a gift from her rich white boyfriend from France – an expensive sealskin coat. Son and Jadine engage in a conversation, and Son makes some inappropriate remarks which is why Jadine threatens to tell Valerian about them, but she changes her mind. When Son gets clean and gets dressed, Jadine becomes attracted to him. Another two black servants, Gideon and Thérèse, who knew about Son's presence in the house before he was discovered, take him shopping. Soon after, Jadine and Son picnic at the beach, where they share their life stories.

Michael does not show up on Christmas day, which makes Margaret feel sad and disappointed. Instead, the members of the household and Son have Christmas dinner together. When Valerian says that he fired Gideon and Thérèse for stealing apples, Sydney, Ondine, and Son get angry; Sydney and Ondine because it disturbs their routines when it comes to doing the household chores, and Son because he feels this act was unfair as Valerian owed his wealth to black people, since his candy company made profit thanks to hard work of black people. Arguing intensifies and culminates in Ondine's revelation of Margaret's long-kept secret – that Margaret abused her son Michael when he was a boy.

Soon after the failed Christmas dinner, Son and Jadine begin a romantic relationship and leave the island to go to New York, where they have a wonderful time together. However, when they visit Son's hometown Eloe, their relationship begins to fall apart. Fundamental differences when it comes to their upbringing, lifestyles, and wishes for the future, become apparent. After many verbal and physical fights, Jadine leaves Son. On her way to Paris, she stops by Isle des Chevaliers to collect her coat. During Jadine's conversation with her aunt, it becomes clear to Ondine that Jadine does not care about her and Sydney. Soon after Jadine leaves for Paris, Son embarks on a search for her. Thérèse agrees to take him to L'Arbe de la

Croix by boat but leaves him on another part of the island; the one believed to be inhabited by the race of blind horsemen, the descendant of the first slaves who were brought to the island. Thérèse informs Son that he can make a choice now but suggests he should join the horsemen, ending the novel with a mysterious scene that deprives readers of knowledge about what happens next.

When it comes to the analysis of the novel, it is important to draw attention to the story behind the title, which carries symbolic relevance. In the folk tale *Tar Baby*, the farmer tries to catch a rabbit by making a tar baby that he places in the cabbage patch, hoping to lure the rabbit. When the rabbit touches the tar baby, it becomes stuck. Barbara Christian sheds light on the symbolism in Morrison's novel: "In Morrison's version, the folk tale is extended to a contemporary fable as she analyzes the complexities of class, race, and sex and how they affect Afro-Americans still held captive in the present-day West" (1985: 66). There are many interpretations of which character in the novel could be a metaphor for the tar baby, that would be analyzed in great detail later on in the chapter. However, Christian suggests that Morrison uses this folk story to emphasize the importance of racial, gender, and class perspectives when it comes to the identity construction of black people.

Discussing the novel's title and its connection to the themes it elaborates on, Missy Dehn Kubitschek notably remarks that the novel "…investigates the relationships between power and stories, particularly folk tales or myths. The novel examines power in many interesting structures, including at least nationality, geographic setting, race, class, and gender, each of which becomes a thematic issue" (1998: 101). The novel explores the power struggles between white and black people, among black people of different social statuses, men and women, and between respect and celebration of traditional values and myths that account for the black population's cultural heritage and total disregard for them. Therefore, it points to binary oppositions between North and South, black and white, wealth and lack of financial means, cultural awareness and cultural negligence, and city and town, all of which cause significant interference with the individuation process of the characters. While widely present in the black community, these binary oppositions are illustrated in the example of a relationship between Son and Jadine, whose worldviews and lifestyles are opposed and who, despite their best efforts, do not manage to overcome them.

Tar Baby, the novel that is, according to Malin Walther Pereira, "the least admired, least researched, and least taught of her novels" (2010: 226), tackles significant issues of interracial and intra-racial relationships, the sense of national belonging, the importance of cultural heritage, domestic violence, capitalism, and colonialism in an attempt to emphasize their contribution to identity conflicts in female characters. To comprehend their impact on identity development, it is necessary to employ intersectional analysis of several relevant perspectives.

5.2 Conflicts of female identity from diversified perspectives

Toni Morrison explores racial, gender, and class conflicts and their effect on black people's identity development in her novels. Since identity is the product of many different contexts and influences, it is essential to incorporate an intersectional approach when analyzing characters' personalities and their path toward self-actualization. According to Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins, who researched the topic of intersectionality in great detail: "Using a social structural analysis of race, class, and gender turns your attention to how they work as *systems of power* – systems that advantage and disadvantage groups differently depending on their social location" (2016: 51). The social status is determined by the intersection of several categories, such as race, gender, class, age, identification with a particular group, level of appreciation of cultural beliefs, etc. The novel proves the necessity

of an intersectional approach upon analysis of the characters, as they cannot solely be defined by belonging to one category. When exploring Jadine's individuation process, it is noteworthy to mention that she is a black, wealthy, educated young girl who discards her cultural heritage as she is intent on becoming a modern woman not defined by her origin. On the other hand, Son's personality is inextricably connected to his racial and cultural identity and defined by his lower social position according to the class system.

By depicting characters who are incredibly different when it comes to their self-definition within the race, gender, and class categories, Morrison draws attention to the more significant problems in the United States, suggesting that these characters were selected to create a microcosm of American society. This is supported by Carmen Gillespie's claim that: "The central characters of *Tar Baby* may be read as representing the race, class, and gender conflicts of the United States in particular, and more generally may represent the way that those conflicts appear in all human interactions" (2008: 215). Gillespie suggests that racial, gender, and class issues can be found worldwide, not only in the United States. Perhaps that is the reason why Morrison decided to include such a diverse array of characters and even incorporate white people; to show the universality of problems stemming from the interconnectedness of concepts of race, class, and gender.

Apart from race, gender, and class, it is significant to include concepts of cultural heritage in the intersectional analysis of characters' identity, as their appreciation or rejection of traditional beliefs greatly influences their identity construction. Linden Peach speaks of the significant importance of cultural aspects: "The novels are concerned with people who in terms of their ancestry are displaced, dispossessed and separated from their identity and history" (1995: 136). The novel argues that historical and cultural isolation might cause identity crises, thus implying heritage and culture's crucial role in building one's identity. By stating that: "The sense of self and one's role in the larger culture has been caught in the crossfire between such culturally constructed oppositions as exclusion/inclusion, freedom/slavery, and tolerance/prejudice, as well as between the contradictions of white attitudes" (Page 1995: 22), Philip Page notes the connection between cultural heritage and binary oppositions that it provokes, clarifying the necessity to research the issues of culture concerning race, class, and gender.

Therefore, to explore female identity, that is, in Peach's words, "both externally multiple and internally fractured" (1995: 84), it is mandatory to include a variety of perspectives and place particular emphasis on their intersection. Accordingly, the analysis of identity construction of female identities will consist of historical, social, and narratological perspectives, black feminist criticism, and psychoanalytical perspective, including trauma studies.

5.2.1 Historical and political perspectives

Morrison's choice of the Caribbean as the setting for the novel carries major historical significance. The Caribbean islands had great economic potential as their climate was perfect for growing many products that could account for profitable businesses. However, to make their businesses profitable, the entrepreneurs needed an affordable workforce that they found in black slaves. Eric Williams provides a comprehensive explanation regarding the reason why the black slaves were the obvious choice: "The islands were useless to their owners without a labor supply. It was to satisfy the labor requirements of the West Indian islands that the greatest migration in recorded history took place. This was the Negro slave trade" (1942: 11). In this way, a large amount of the black population arrived on the Caribbean islands, thus contributing to the enormous profits of the colonizers. Williams emphasizes that the Caribbean soil and

climate are suitable for a variety of products that were important to the colonizers, such as "sugar cane, coffee, cocoa, cotton, tobacco, coconuts…" (1942: 5). Nevertheless, in addition to the negative aspects of colonization, Williams claims that it was the valuable products, colonization, arrival of slaves, and consequent major economic boom, that transformed the originally unimportant islands into very desirable destinations: "It was, in fact, sugar which raised these insignificant tropical islands from the status of pirates' nests to the dignity of the most precious colonies known to the Western World up to the nineteenth century" (1942: 12).

Considering the historical context, it appears logical that Morrison chose the Caribbean Island as the setting to depict complex racial relationships between white and black people and among black people. Valerian Street, the owner of a luxurious house on the island, is conveniently the owner of a candy factory he inherited from his family, the factory that depended on sugar and cocoa for candy production, the ingredients that black slaves were responsible for growing on the Caribbean islands. However, despite these historical circumstances, Valerian does not consider black people to be deserving of any praise or reward for his candy empire and financial success. Valerian's actions support Williams' claim that "This contribution of the Negro has failed to receive adequate recognition" (1942: 14), insisting that the economic success of the colonizing countries is "…indebted to Negro labor" (1942: 14). Nevertheless, even though it seems that white people in the novel completely forgot about the contributions of black slaves to their present-day wealth, the black man Son, who is in touch with his tradition and ancestry, believes that these mistakes should be acknowledged and rectified. That is the reason why Son gets extremely upset when he finds out that Valerian fired Gideon and Thérèse for stealing apples; as they are descendants of the black people who worked on plantations that made white people's wealth possible, Son believes they are entitled to free apples, at the very least.

It is noteworthy to observe that although Sydney, Ondine, and Jadine are all black people and share a common history with the overall black population, they do not appear to be disturbed by the news of Gideon and Thérèse's firing in the same way, and with the same intensity that Son is; Jadine is uninterested in the topic, while Sydney and Ondine get angry with Valerian for not informing them earlier as the lack of servants would interfere with maintaining the household.

Apart from economic and human exploitation, Gurleen Grewal states that the novel suggests that human settlement in the Caribbean also destroyed natural beauties: "In *Tar Baby*, ecological damage is the visible counterpart of cultural displacement, both long-term effects of colonization" (1998: 85). By portraying Valerian's struggle to take care of his plants until Son comes to assist him, Morrison illustrates the inability of white people to dwell in the island alone, they need the help of the black people who appreciate and value the nature of the Caribbean. Eric Williams makes an interesting comparison when he says, "Nature in the Caribbean has been as kind as man has been unkind" (1942: 6), emphasizing the natural beauty of the Caribbean as one of its most distinctive traits. Valerian's insistence on living in the Caribbean despite his wife's disapproval and great distance from his son, friends, and candy factory, shows the island's appeal that draws white people to visit it and even live there.

When discussing the historical perspective, it is relevant to mention the circumstances surrounding the novel's publication date. Maria DiBattista presents the historical context in the 1980s: "*Tar Baby*, published in 1981, appeared after a turbulent decade when Afro-Americans were not only creating new and increasingly powerful self-images, but also contesting any depiction that did not conform to their sense of how the world appeared and felt to them" (2005: 154). As black people were only granted civil rights in 1964, they were still getting used to their newly acquired sense of independence and power when rethinking their self-definition. With the Civil Rights Act, black people were equivalent to white people, at least in the eyes of the law, which probably increased their self-confidence regarding racial identity. On the other

hand, this historical period also brought about some negative sentiments. J. Brooks Bouson adds a relevant perspective worthy of discussion:

> …Morrison investigates the crisis-of-identity within the African American community as she examines what it means to be a black in the post-Civil Rights period in which the idea of black solidarity has been challenged by a recognition of the differences in values and class and education that divide African Americans (2000: 103).

Granting civil rights to the black population caused an identity crisis for the overall black community as it drew attention to the many inequalities among black people regarding their social status, class, financial status, economic prospects, educational opportunities, etc. It seemed that the emphasis on these differences among black people that became apparent after they solved one of the most critical problems and were granted civil rights caused division among them and threatened the feeling of solidarity characteristic of and unique to black communities. Morrison portrays the identity crisis of the black community by depicting very complex relationships among black people in the novel; black people, together with white people in the Streets household believe that Son is a rapist and a criminal simply because he is black and poor; the animosity between Sydney and Ondine on the one hand and Gideon and Thérèse on the other shows that, despite the same race, the class differences do not allow them to be friendly toward each other; Jadine is not aware of the values that are cherished in the black community, and she shows a complete disregard for black history and tradition when she says she does not appreciate black art and that she finds the expectations to take care of her family burdensome. In this way, Morrison presents the identity crises of characters as reflective of historical circumstances.

Moreover, Morrison illustrates that historical patterns tend to be repeated, especially in terms of inequality. David E. Magill makes an insightful observation when he states, "*Tar Baby* represents colonial inequality as a historically based system of racial prejudice" (2003: 21). Hierarchies and racial stereotypes persist in the novel despite the changed historical and social circumstances. However, unlike in the past when racial hierarchies existed only between black and white people, the 1980s introduced new layers of hierarchies, as black people developed discriminatory practices among the black population itself by discriminating against each other on the bases of social position, class, level of education, financial income, etc. By offering a variety of characters of different races, ages, jobs, and social statuses, Morrison presents readers with the microcosm of American society in the 1980s, illustrating contentious issues coloring the lives of both black and white people.

The plot's historical context and setting also imply the impossibility of escaping from the past, as history is one of the crucial aspects of the identity development of characters. Sandra Pouchet Paquet pinpoints how the connection between past and present is shown in the novel: "One of the ironies of the Street household is that the ancestral connection is very much alive around them in the island's myths and natives; a reality from which they are cut off by a carefully cultivated attachment to wealth and privilege, Valerian style;" (1997: 196). Even though the Streets live in a beautiful mansion, have servants, and import American goods, all of which make them feel comfortable and remind them of their life in the United States, they cannot avoid the historical past as native inhabitants of the island such as Thérèse, ancient myths about the blind dwellers of the island, complex relationships between black and white people and among black people, surround them. All of these emphasize the inescapability of the past and the necessity to deal with issues regarding it.

When analyzing historical perspective as a significant factor concerning the construction of one's identity, Erik H. Erikson pointedly remarks that: "…we cannot separate personal growth and communal change, nor can we separate […] the identity crisis in individual life and contemporary crises in historical development because the two help to define each other and are truly relative to each other" (1994: 23). Characters' personalities cannot be analyzed independently of the historical context, because they are the products of historical circumstances and they reflect historical changes. In this respect, Morrison juxtaposes Son and Jadine, the first one closely related to his ancestry and the second one at a great distance from it, exploring how these two characters respond to the world they live in and how their different approaches to black history and cultural heritage affect their romantic relationship.

Ultimately, historical context also shows that relationships and hierarchies among people are established according to power, and while categories of people who own power might change, the very existence of hierarchies persists. As Alvin O. Thompson shrewdly concludes: "…power relations are at the core of human relations" (2006: 21). *Tar Baby* illustrates that, apart from racial differences, hierarchies between different social classes define both the critical aspects of one's identity development and the core of power relations among characters.

5.2.2 Social perspective

In the exploration of identity formation, it is pivotal to comprehend the influence of social factors. John N. Duvall believes that "…the tension between identity as a biological essence and identity as a social construction is perhaps the central motivating opposition in her work" (2000: 9), suggesting that identity conflicts in Morrison's novels arise from several social implications that affect one's path toward self-actualization.

Morrison explores social dynamics in *Tar Baby*, where class differences emerge as one of the defining parameters of one's identity and the primary source of conflicts among characters. Margaret L. Anderson and Patricia Hill Collins define the term: "Class is a system that differently structures group access to economic, political, cultural, and social resources" (2016: 60). Belonging to a particular social class is determined by several factors, such as social status in the community, wealth, education, involvement in political or social events, etc. In *Tar Baby*, Morrison shows that categorizing people into social classes is far from easy. While Morrison portrays characters such as Valerian Street, who is due to his race and class at the very top of the social hierarchy, and Son, who is at the bottom for the same reasons, she also depicts characters such as Jadine, Ondine, and Sydney, who cannot be easily identified with belonging to a particular class. Doreatha Drummond Mbalia perceives the three of them as "African petty bourgeois" (1991: 72), indicating that "…this group of people exists between two worlds, denied entry into the ruling class due to their lack of wealth and/or their skin color and refusing to identify with the African masses to whom they owe their allegiance" (1991: 72). Sydney, Ondine, and Jadine are black, and while they do not deny their racial identity, they consider their social status to be superior to other black people, while they simultaneously understand that they are inferior to white people.

In connection with specific social and class positions of characters in the novel, Stelamaris Coser states that Morrison keenly observes the predominant issues of the black population: "*Tar Baby* warns of the violence and inequality brought about by slavery and colonialism, a distortion that can be seen in the poverty of so many black people and their dependence on whites…" (1994: 117). Despite Jadine's beauty and intelligence, it is disputable whether she would have become a famous model and outstanding student if she did not have

financial assistance from the Streets. Similarly, considering their low social status, lack of education, and poor financial means, Sydney and Ondine were fortunate to work for wealthy employers; otherwise, their position could have been similar to Gideon and Thérèse's. In this way, Morrison illustrates black people's dependence on white people, as their success is very often connected with the help and support they receive from them; this shows that colonial consequences have significantly impacted future generations of black people.

Sydney, Ondine, and Jadine's racial attitudes are exposed with the appearance of Son, a poor black man. As noted by Barbara Christian: "His appearance of wild blackness exposes Sydney and Ondine's short-sighted, classist hypocrisy, for they jump to protect their master Valerian from one of their own" (1985: 68). Sydney and Ondine's assumption that Son is a dangerous rapist is based on their perception of his race, gender, and class; they use the same notions of discrimination that white people often use when discriminating against black people. Therefore, Sydney and Ondine reveal to be hypocritical as their racial identity is the same as Son's, and their social status would probably be very similar if it had not been for white people. In her description of Sydney's attitude toward Son, Gurleen Grewal comments succinctly: "The reader is meant to note the bigotry that Sydney displays in differentiating his class from Son's" (1998: 92). Apart from looking down on him, Sydney also verbally assures Son that he is inferior, insulting his origin and emphasizing the difference between them: "I know you, but you don't know me. I am a Phil-a-delphia Negro mentioned in the book of the very same name. My people owned drugstores and taught school while yours were still cutting their faces open so as to be able to tell one of you from the other" (Morrison 1981: 163). Sydney takes pride in his origin and believes that his family background entitles him to a superior position compared to other black people.

Furthermore, Morrison explores the impact of social class on the relationship between Son and Jadine, who belong to different social classes. Morrison elaborates on the burning issues in their relationship: "But they had a problem about what work to do, when and where to do it, and where to live. Those things hinged on what they felt about who they were, and what their responsibilities were in being black" (1993: 404). Morrison notes that the critical problems in Son and Jadine's romance represent the mixture of racial and social issues; they belong to different social classes and have a different understanding of the importance of racial past and cultural heritage. These differences stem from how they were brought up, as Jadine believes that education is essential to succeed in life, and as much as she tries to enforce her beliefs upon Son, he rejects them. Son was raised to have different opinions, thinking that money has no value and refusing to accept white people's money as this would mean betrayal of his principles. On the other hand, Jadine is a "signifier of consumption culture" (Mori 1999: 37), who considers money essential in providing her with the lifestyle she wishes for. In her arguments with Son, Jadine expresses her opinion on the importance of money: "It's a prison, poverty is. Look at what its absence made you do: run, hide, steal, lie" (Morrison 1981: 171).

Nevertheless, despite the differences that both Jadine and Son are aware of, they are drawn to each other and attempt to overcome all the social, class, and cultural obstacles to make their relationship work. However, over time, both Son and Jadine wish for the other to compromise as they both want to be in control of their lives, which eventually becomes a power struggle. Jadine, provoked by Son's physical violence, leaves him and returns to her privileged, wealthy lifestyle in Paris. Barbara Christian considers Jadine's act to signify the inability to break free from depending on white people: "…as Thérèse the myth-teller has said, Son had come for Jadine. But Jadine goes for herself, even if it means using what whites give her, which finally binds her even more to their ways" (1985: 68). After the firsthand experience of everything that she has rejected in her life (poverty, way of life in a traditional patriarchal black community, violence), Jadine realizes that she prefers what she has abandoned in Paris – education, wealth, freedom, even if that means being financially dependent on white people.

Apart from describing class differences among black people, Morrison also portrays class differences between Valerian and Margaret. Due to her humble background, when Margaret married rich Valerian, she felt more connected to Ondine than Valerian's friends. Additionally, Morrison shows that, despite their wealth and high social class, Valerian and Margaret are unhappy, and their marriage is fraught with disagreements. Discussing the social class of the Streets, Carmen Gillespie makes a critical remark: "Margaret and Valerian Street illustrate the destructive impact of the intersection of power and identity. Without the labels conferred to them by wealth and beauty, neither of them has any meaningful selfhood…" (2008: 216). Because they consider themselves to be privileged in terms of racial, social, and economic aspects, Valerian and Margaret do nothing to improve their lifestyle or shape their personalities. By portraying two different relationships (between Valerian and Margaret and between Son and Jadine), Morrison suggests that social class and financial means are not sufficient for a successful relationship, and yet they are so important that they might end it.

When it comes to women's patriarchal roles and position in society, Morrison juxtaposes places such as New York and Paris which celebrate and welcome independent women, and Eloe, which closely follows patriarchal rules. Jadine represents the modern black woman. She is educated, independent, and financially secure, and she transcends the historically determined limiting categories for black women that define women as wives, mothers, and homemakers. Despite her dependence on Valerian in terms of financial security, Jadine is encouraged to follow her dreams and live her life the way she wants to. Toni Morrison describes the character traits of such a contemporary woman: "The characteristics they encourage in themselves are more male characteristics, not because she has a fundamental identity crisis, but because she wants to be truly free" ("Toni Morrison" 1994: 105). Jadine is a contemporary woman, and her male characteristics are observed in her freedom and independence; she is free to make her own choices which are evident in her contemplation on what work she should focus on next, as well as her doubt if she should marry Ryk or stay in a relationship with Son. Jadine's mind is fraught with many questions, and she can find answers to her questions on her terms as she is isolated from racial and patriarchal expectations of what a black woman should be. In this way, Jadine displays the main male characteristics of a modern woman, according to Morrison, "self-sufficiency and adventurousness" ("Toni Morrison" 1994: 105).

When Jadine visits Eloe, she discovers that she is not allowed to sleep in the same house with Son, as this would severely violate patriarchal laws in town. Son, who is aware that Jadine is not a typical traditional woman and decides to be in a romantic relationship with her regardless, seems to agree with the conventional expectations of Eloe. Still, it is noteworthy to emphasize that women work just as much as men in Eloe; there is no inferiority when it comes to labor. In this way, the relations between men and women are reminiscent of those that existed in the period of slavery; in Eloe, women are equal to men in terms of work, while inequality persists in terms of patriarchal expectations and rules. When Son's friend, Soldier, asks Jadine who controls her and Son's relationship, it appears clear that Soldier believes one person should be in control and that equality in a relationship is not possible. As noted by Herman Beavers, "His question reveals how the Son/Jadine pairing dramatizes *Tar Baby*'s larger theme and substantiates the argument that Morrison's intention was not to write a love story but rather to examine the nature of power relations and how they are informed by caste, gender, and class" (2018: 46). As much as both Son and Jadine wish to believe that they are equal in their relationship and that there is no power struggle, both of them seem unwilling to compromise and both of them wish to be in control of their actions; Jadine wants Son to get educated which he refuses; Son wishes to stay longer in Eloe which Jadine resents; they are unable to work out the agreement regarding the work they are going to do and the place where they are going to live. Therefore, their relationship inevitably ends.

Unlike Jadine, who defies patriarchal roles and expectations, Son seems to respect them immensely. Although he attempts to accept Jadine as she is, Son's actions prove his adherence to patriarchal sentiments. This is especially noticeable in Son's display of love and affection, revealing his possessiveness and aggression. According to bell hooks, love in a patriarchal society allows and even supports this behavior: "It supported the notion that one could do anything in the name of love: beat people, restrict their movements, even kill them and call it a "crime of passion," plead, "I loved her so much I had to kill her."" (2000: 101). Understood in this way, Son's interpretation of love entirely coincides with the patriarchal meaning of love. Son commits both immoral acts and illegal crimes when he kills his wife and beats and rapes Jadine, and he insists he does it all out of love.

When conversing about gender roles in the novel, Denise Heinze makes a critical remark: "Sydney, Ondine, Jadine, and Margaret all take pride in the qualities that make them valuable to Valerian but because they define themselves almost exclusively in relationship to him, they become appendages rather than autonomous human beings" (1993: 87). Perceiving Valerian, the white, wealthy man, as being at the top of the racial, gender, and class hierarchy, Sydney, Ondine, Margaret, and Jadine depend on him significantly, both in terms of financial means and his opinion of them that affects their perception of themselves.

Another social perspective worthy of critical attention is the notion of the American dream or great success that should be available to everyone who works hard regardless of their race, class, and gender. As much as Valerian is given the impression of someone who fulfilled the American dream, he is a privileged man who inherited the candy factory from his family. Thus, his wealth and success can be attributed to his ancestors and black laborers. Doreatha Drummond Mbalia believes that Morrison, by describing Valerian's comfortable life, expresses the critical problem of the black population: "In *Tar Baby*, Morrison makes clear her position that capitalism, symbolized by the Valerian Street Candy Corporation, is the African's primary enemy (1991: 168). Capitalism and the exploitation of the black workforce account for black people's poor working conditions and inadequate financial compensation, while they ensure that white owners of companies remain wealthy with minimum effort.

Another character in the novel who works very hard to achieve her goals and fulfill the American dream is Jadine. While growing up, Jadine was surrounded by two models; she observed her family members Sydney and Ondine and witnessed their hard work and struggles in exchange for modest salaries that could not provide them the lifestyle Jadine yearned for; on the other hand, Jadine saw Valerian and Margaret Streets' luxurious lifestyle that she aspired to. Barbara Christian examines Jadine's wish to succeed: "But Jadine is presented in the novel as essentially classbound. Her desire to "make it" in the world binds her not just to whites, but to upper-class whites. Her values are not so much that of the ideal southern lady as they are of the white male world" (1985: 78). Having Valerian as her role model, Jadine aspires to achieve what is usually available to rich white men. While running after her ideals, Jadine disregards her cultural beliefs and traditions, as she thinks that appreciating cultural heritage and following her career goals cannot coexist simultaneously.

Taking Jadine's striving for success into account, Gurleen Grewal believes it is important to focus on those who were not given the same opportunities that Jadine was: "Thus an identity claimed by the privileged few – the educated cosmopolitan elite – is problematized and revised from the perspective of those who had no access to the bourgeois modes of self-making" (1998: 6). While Jadine's educational and work success is admirable, she was able to achieve it owing to the help of a wealthy white man. When she criticizes Son for not being more ambitious and for not accomplishing more in his life, Jadine neglects the possibility that she could have been in his or Ondine's place if it had not been for Valerian's financial assistance and guidance.

When discussing the influence of social factors on identity construction, it is significant to mention the spatial aspect and the feeling of belonging that characters have when it comes to different places where the plot takes place. Morrison takes readers from the exotic island in the Caribbean to Paris, New York, and even a small town, Eloe, to depict how different settings affect the characters' path to individuation.

Commenting on the symbolism of Isle des Chevaliers, Julie Cary Nerad says: "The island itself is a microcosmic representation – a sociological greenhouse – of the complex interconnectedness of race, gender, class, nation, and identity" (2006: 831). The choice of Isle des Chevaliers as the novel's primary setting is highly significant because of the island's turbulent history and strained interracial and intra-racial relations. Many predominantly black island inhabitants believe in the mythical story about slaves who became blind when they saw Dominque, where they decided to hide. It is believed they still dwell there and that Thérèse is one of their descendants. When it comes to the current relationship between the native black inhabitants of the island and the black and white newcomers, there is a lot of animosity and intolerance between them. The Streets, Sydney, and Ondine all perceive themselves as superior to Gideon and Thérèse because of their origin and higher social position. When Son, who is from Eloe, visits the island for the first time, he discovers that he has more in common with Gideon and Thérèse than Sydney, Ondine, and Jadine. Because he appreciates his cultural and historical heritage, Son understands the significance of black people's participation in white people's wealth, which is why he believes they deserve more respect and admiration.

The Streets live in the beautiful mansion called L'Arbe de la Croix, symbolizing the white American presence on the island. Patrick Bryce Bjork expounds on the symbolic meaning of the house: "L'Arbe de la Croix serves as the site of repression, and as such, each character remains safely cloistered in the Isle's controlled freedom from difference and thus in its denial of lack" (1994: 116). Apart from Jadine's picnic with Son on the beach, there is no textual evidence that the Streets, Sydney, and Ondine ever leave L'Arbe de la Croix, which means that they are entirely separated from the island's myths, the culture of the inhabitants, or any knowledge on the island. Bjork further adds to the discussion: "This abduction of the island's threatening, collective consciousness provides a frame for the novel's developing dialectic between the presence of individual assertion and the absence of cultural cohesiveness" (1994: 112). The racial, social, and class dynamics of the Isle des Chevaliers and L'Arbe de la Croix denote the interpersonal problems that exist among people living there but also point to the more significant issue present among the black population; white and black people's negligence and even rejection of black cultural heritage and tradition.

After Isle des Chevaliers, Morrison takes readers to New York, the urban environment that emphasizes differences between Jadine and Son, as she feels at home in New York, where she has plenty of job opportunities and many friends, while Son changes menial jobs, refuses to educate himself and feels nostalgic for his hometown Eloe. Linden Peach elucidates the importance of including urban environments in the novel:

> The space which is given in the novel to the cosmopolitan, eclectic nature of New York and Paris is a reminder that traditional boundaries of identity such as place, race, gender and class have become fractured by the flow of people, cultures, information and ideas across geographical frontiers (1995: 85).

Morrison suggests that identity development for people such as Jadine, who travels and does not consider herself to belong to one place and to come from one place, is shaped by all the different places she visits. Therefore, Jadine does not appreciate black cultural heritage as she never considered black tradition an essential aspect of her personality. On the other hand, Son,

who takes great pride in his origin and his hometown Eloe, considers black ancestry to be of pivotal importance for all black people. Eloe is a small town where only black people live and where patriarchal laws are closely followed. Jadine feels very uncomfortable in Eloe, as she has strange dreams that indicate her difference from her ancestors and other black people who honor black traditions and beliefs. Gurleen Grewal comments on Morrison's decision to set the story in both urban and rural areas: "Juxtaposing the provincial with the metropolitan and charting various geographies of class, *Tar Baby* depicts the struggle over cultural definitions and identifications in a postmodern world" (1998: 79). By including large cities, small town, exotic island in the Caribbean, Morrison illustrates the significant influence that spatial aspect has on one's identity development. Due to her nomadic lifestyle, Jadine's cultural identity is undefined, affecting her ability to settle in one place and call it home. This draws attention to the national feeling of not belonging that some black people feel. Morrison demonstrates the sense of homelessness in Sydney and Ondine, who do not have a home of their own but who are forced to go wherever the Streets wish to go, and Jadine, who, when asked where she is from, mentions three places that are geographically very distant from one another – New York, Paris, and the Caribbean. The reason why Jadine comes to Isle des Chevaliers is that she suffers an identity crisis when her boyfriend Ryk proposes to her. Unaccustomed to living permanently in one place, Jadine questions whether she wants to stay with Ryk – and in Paris – forever.

Concerning feeling of belonging, Herbert William Rice makes a relevant observation when he states: "Most of the characters are separated from their homes; thus, they are dependent upon one another in a way that they would not be in more familiar territory" (1996: 78). The Streets move from Philadelphia to settle in the Caribbean, Sydney and Ondine follow them; Jadine moves from Paris to Isle des Chevaliers to New York; Son moves from Eloe to Isle des Chevaliers to New York. The feelings of displacement and homelessness they inevitably feel might encourage them to remain friendly and involved with people they otherwise would not. In this regard, Sydney and Ondine keep working for the Streets despite Ondine's tiredness and dissatisfaction with her job; Margaret continues living on the island even though she dislikes it and misses the United States; Jadine stays with Son despite their differences and his violent behavior. All of them but Jadine fear uncertainty, so they choose safety.

Moreover, special attention in the novel is attributed to the different positions of Sydney, Ondine, and Jadine in the L'Arbe de la Croix. Although the three of them are members of the same family, Sydney and Ondine are treated as servants, while Jadine is thought of as a member of the Streets family. Hence Jadine has her bedroom and dines in the dining room together with Margaret and Valerian while being waited on by Sydney. On the other hand, Sydney and Ondine have their meals in the kitchen, and the room allocated to them is simple and modest. This shows that Valerian and Margaret's treatment of Jadine, Sydney, and Ondine is based on social position and educational attainment rather than race.

5.2.3 Black feminist criticism

When exploring the influence of race on characters' identity construction in *Tar Baby*, Morrison brings fresh perspectives in this novel as she includes a very prominent white presence, all the while discussing the relationship between white and black people, relationships among black people, and the very complex issue of rejection of racial identity as opposed to taking pride in it.

At the very top of racial, class, and gender hierarchy stands Valerian Street, a man who earned his superior position by genetics and historical tradition that discriminates against everyone who is not a rich white male. Valerian seems to enjoy his position of power as he

adopts a condescending attitude toward everyone in his life. Carmen Gillespie further supports this claim: "Valerian's assumptions and actions mirror the colonial enterprise of nation building that has resulted in the domination of people who are racially marked as colored all over the world" (2008: 216). Valerian Street can be seen as the representative of the colonial past of the United States of America when the racial, class, and gender hierarchies were very clearly delineated. Valerian's sexist and racist behavior is evident in his constant criticism of his wife Margaret, his decision to fire Gideon and Thérèse for stealing apples, and his treatment of Sydney and Ondine compared to his treatment of Jadine.

Nevertheless, despite the impression that Valerian conveys of being a strong man who is in control of his life and household, he turns out to be an ignorant man who does not know anything about his son's whereabouts and has no knowledge of his wife's physical and psychological abuse of their son, and who is not even able to nurture plants in his greenhouse. Johnnie M. Stover believes that Valerian's inability to grow plants successfully signifies "…Morrison's rejection of the maleness and whiteness that attempt to categorize, domesticate, tame, and dominate this womblike, Black female environment" (2003: 17). Valerian displays hypocrisy in his treatment of black servants, and especially in his firing of Gideon and Thérèse for stealing apples. Son considers this to be a petty crime considering the fact that black people were responsible for the wealth and success of Valerian's candy factory, something that Valerian, intentionally or not, does not seem to be aware of. Taking Valerian and his wife's actions and attitudes into account, Carmen Gillespie concludes: "Together the Streets represent the instability and illusion of the authority of white privilege" (2008: 216). Margaret, who, according to her race and class, stands at the top of the hierarchy when the female gender is considered, is unable to control her life. She abuses her son, has no friends, and cannot even cook Christmas dinner for her family. In this respect, both spouses appear to be unhappy and dissatisfied with their lives despite all the racial and class privileges.

Son's appearance in the novel reveals racial tensions among the characters. Keith E. Byerman addresses the importance of Son's arrival to the Streets household: "The responses to his intrusion reveal the natures and insecurities of the residents" (1993: 119). Everyone in the house is frightened and perceives Son as a dangerous rapist and criminal. Their perception is based on Son's race and class, as poor black men are usually stereotyped in this way. Although Jadine, Sydney, and Ondine are also black, they adopt the white gaze when they form their opinion of Son. Jadine even describes Son as a "nigger" (Morrison 1981: 129) in front of Margaret, displaying her identification with the white race in observation of poor black people. Additionally, when Jadine speaks with Son, she tells him: "It depends on what you want from us" (Morrison 1981: 118), "us" being the Streets, Sydney, Ondine, and herself. She considers all of them superior to Son because of his low social status. Despite her skin color, Jadine has enjoyed many privileges that were typically available exclusively to white people, such as an expensive lifestyle, traveling, and education. That is the reason why Jadine identifies with white people to a more significant degree than with black people. K.C. Lalthlamuani makes a valid observation: "This idea of acting white or black is explored in *Tar Baby* and implies that being identified as a certain race has to do with the values one lives by as much as by physical characteristics" (2014: 129). As Jadine was brought up with her uncle and aunt on the one hand and the Streets on the other, white tradition and cultural values shaped her personality. Additionally, being educated at Sorbonne university and working as a fashion model brought her closer to white people, as these opportunities were rarely available to black people. However, Ryk's proposal and her attraction to Son make her rethink her life choices and identification with black and white people. Nerad mentions the significance of Jadine's full name (as the black people address her) and nickname (the white people call her Jade): "The dual names signify the pressure the character feels to define and claim an identity in a culture that defines and delimits individuals by race, gender, and class" (2006: 636). Jadine is

constantly split between the white and black world; her fiancé Ryk and boyfriend Son, Sydney and Ondine, Valerian and Margaret, the United States and Paris. However, her fascination with the coat that Ryk sent to her as a Christmas gift, her sitting with Margaret and Valerian for meals while her uncle serves on her, and her rejection to help her aunt and uncle and free them from demanding jobs all suggest that Jadine has more similarities with white people in the novel.

When it comes to Son, he is radically different from Sydney, Ondine, and Jadine. Son's remembrance of painful black history makes him very sensitive to racial issues. He becomes bitterly angry when he discovers that Valerian fired Gideon and Thérèse because, in Doreatha Drummond Mbalia's words, "…he understands that the United States is the capitalist capital of the world and, therefore, the African's worst enemy" (1991: 80). Son is aware of the economic exploitation of black people and the central part they played in white people's success and profit. Son resents the Streets for not honoring the participation of black people in their success, but he also disapproves of black people's subtle agreement with the Streets. Son criticizes Jadine for not confronting Valerian regarding Gideon and Thérèse's situation and treating the Streets as her family while treating Sydney and Ondine as if they were her servants. Son even tells Jadine directly that she acts like a white person when she accuses him of wishing to rape her: "Why you little white girls always think somebody's trying to rape you?" (Morrison 1981: 121). When she angrily responds to him that she is not white, Son replies: "No? Then why don't you settle down and stop acting like it" (Morrison 1981: 121). However, although Son is fully acquainted with Jadine's personality and character traits, he is still attracted to her; he starts a relationship with her and even plans their future together.

In many of Son and Jadine's arguments regarding the relationship between black and white people, Son expresses his view regarding what that relationship should look like: "They should work together sometimes, but they should not eat together or live together or sleep together. Do any of those personal things in life" (Morrison 1981: 210). Son believes interracial relations should only be businesslike and that black and white people should not be involved socially or romantically. Therefore, Son condemns black women who engage in romantic relationships with white men, blaming them and not the white men for the long history of sexual exploitation. Herman Beavers discusses Son's stand on interracial relationships: "Son's diatribe is distinguished, at root, by his assertion that black women are the main culprits in the sustenance and furthering of the brand of white supremacy that emerged during antebellum slavery" (2018: 50). Son is immersed in the past to that extent that he still holds a grudge against the white population as a whole, showing unwillingness to forgive and forget. Son insists that black people should be united in their animosity toward white people. When they first met, Son accused Jadine of gaining education, success, and fame by being involved with white men. When they started the romantic relationship, most of their arguments were caused by his criticism of Jadine for using Valerian's money. In one of their heated arguments, Son tells Jadine she should return to Ryk and have his children, expressing his opinion on black women's involvement with white men: "Then you can do exactly what you bitches have always done: take care of white folks' children. Feed, love and care for white people's children. That's what you were born for; that's what you have waited for all your life. So have that white man's baby, that's your job" (Morrison 1981: 269). Son's accusations of black women imply that he believes black women were involved with white men and cared for the white children voluntarily. While it is true that in the 1980s, when the novel was published, interracial relationships and marriages were not forced, that was not the case in the past. With his harsh words, not only does Son neglect the sexual exploitation of black women, but he also shows no wish to mend and improve the relationship between the two races in the present moment. Son's comment that "People don't mix races; they abandon them or pick them" (Morrison 1981: 270) shows that he is an extreme racist who believes in the purity of races. It is important

to emphasize that it is this kind of extremist thinking that justified the onset of slavery and many forms of exploitation and that Son's attitudes and opinions show that little progress has been made when it comes to interraciality.

Racial tensions in the novel are made even more complicated by the analysis of Sydney and Ondine's attitudes and opinions of white and black people. On the one hand, Sydney and Ondine respect Valerian and serve him dutifully as they understand all the benefits that Valerian provides for them and Jadine. On the other hand, Sydney reveals his opinion of Valerian when he tells Son that the reason why he took him in was not generosity or good intentions but a selfish form of entertainment: "White folks play with Negroes. It entertained *him*, that's all, inviting you to dinner. He don't give a damn what it does to anybody else. You think he cares about his wife? That you scared his wife? If it entertained her, he'd *hand* her to you" (Morrison 1981: 162). This remark shows that, despite his servility, Sydney does not have a positive opinion of Valerian, especially when his treatment of black people is taken into consideration. Stelamaris Coser agrees with Sydney's interpretation of Valerian's actions: "For the perceptive reader, both Son and the coat represent species abused for the pleasure and profit of the white, upper-class rule" (1994: 109). While Ryk uses the expensive coat to impress Jadine, Valerian uses Son to entertain himself in an otherwise dreary island environment.

Nevertheless, despite Valerian's motives for hosting Son in his house, it seems that he also believes in the importance of respecting one's race. When he witnessed Sydney, Ondine, and Jadine's reactions to Son's presence, Valerian felt: "Disappointment nudging contempt for the outrage Jade and Sydney and Ondine exhibited in defending property and personnel that did not belong to them from a black man who was one of their own" (Morrison 1981: 145). Valerian expected that the three of them would feel sympathy and understanding, perhaps even support for Son's cause, yet they all defended Margaret and felt superior to him. The feelings and reactions of Sydney, Ondine, and Jadine show that boundaries between black and white cannot be clearly formed. With reference to this, Denise Heinze presents a critical perspective: "But as drawn as the lines appear to be between light and dark, Morrison shows that colorism is a complicated problem; those who struggle to acquire a superiority based on the color of their skin often experience conflicting desires to attach themselves to those across the color line" (1993: 23). The novel illustrates the characters' great desire to socialize with people who are racially different from them; Sydney and Ondine work for Valerian, maintaining his household and wishing to honor all his wishes and requests; Jadine looks up to Valerian and shows great respect for him; on the other hand, Jadine also shows great interest in Son who, despite the same race, has different values from Jadine who aspires to white culture and lifestyle typical of white people; Valerian is intrigued by Son to that extent that he welcomes him into his home and treats him better than his faithful servants Sydney and Ondine.

Another important point that should be taken into consideration when discussing racial relations in the novel is the symbolism and meaning behind the story about the tar baby. In the folktale, the farmer wishes to catch the rabbit stealing cabbage from him, so he builds a scarecrow that looks like a baby made out of tar. The rabbit does not realize that it is not real, so it tries to shake its hand, and it hits it repeatedly until the rabbit eventually gets trapped. Understanding the tar baby as a racial metaphor, Carmen Gillespie concludes: "Each of the characters is stuck, in one way or another to his or her own raced tar baby" (2008: 219). One of the possible interpretations could be that Valerian made Jadine into a tar baby, as he helped her enjoy all the benefits and privileges of the white culture. Morrison supports this interpretation by saying: "Suppose somebody simply has all the benefits of what the white Western world has to offer; what would the relationship be with the rabbit who really comes out of the briar patch? And what does the briar patch mean to the rabbit?" ("Toni Morrison" 1994: 102). Morrison extends the metaphor by implying that the relationship between the tar

baby and the rabbit could symbolize Jadine and Son's relationship, his infatuation with her, and his inability to let her go even when he realizes there is no future for them.

Discussing the possible meanings of the tar baby, Nancy Kang elaborates on the positive and negative interpretations of the metaphor. She begins with the negative one: "On the negative side, the feminized tar baby suggests black women's voicelessness, emotional denigration by males, external constructions of black femininity, racist suggestions of pollution and contamination, and victimization through implied and actual physical violence" (2006: 338). Jadine displays the negative meaning of tar baby when she leaves Isle des Chevaliers with Son; the time they spend together in Eloe and New York illustrates Jadine's endurance as she puts up with patriarchal restrictions, physical and psychological abuse, all of which affect her physical appearance and job prospects. However, Kang also adds the positive meaning: "On the more positive side, the tar-covered figure comes across as a female refusing to acknowledge the dominating male presence, an embodiment of enigmatic or aggressive female power, and the attractive cohesiveness of black sisterhood…" (2006: 338). Jadine also displays the positive connotation of the tar baby toward the end of the novel, when she breaks free from Son's aggressive behavior and regains control of her independence.

Additionally, apart from Jadine, Son can also be interpreted as the tar baby since Jadine was simultaneously fascinated and repelled by him until she discovered that she could not resist him. However, unlike Son, Jadine manages to break free from her tar baby and leave Son. Furthermore, if the tar baby would be thought of as white culture and values, Sydney, Ondine, and Jadine could all represent the rabbit that gets stuck to the tar baby, unable and unwilling to escape from it.

When discussing racial symbols in the novel, it is noteworthy to mention the spatial aspect that has already been addressed in social terms, but Isle des Chevaliers also has racial significance. Doreatha Drummond Mbalia suggests that this island indicates the unity of black people and their common ancestry: "Recognizing that people of African descent, no matter where they live, share a common identity, a common history, and a common oppression, she uses an island in the Caribbean as the dominant and pivotal setting for her novel" (1991: 29). Isle des Chevaliers is inhabited by both black native inhabitants and black and white immigrants; thus, it serves as the constant reminder of the historical conflicts between the races and contributes to ongoing tensions between them in the present. Additionally, it shows that the black population shares a common ancestry that is not equally important and valuable to all the black people portrayed in the novel.

Discussing the subject matter of race, Toni Morrison shrewdly observed: "Race has become metaphorical – a way of referring to and disguising forces, events, classes, and expressions of social decay and economic division far more threatening to the body politic than biological "race" ever was" (1993: 63). As evidenced by the marginal importance attributed to the actual skin color of the characters, Morrison infused the notion of race in the novel with metaphorical significance. Regardless of their skin color, characters act as either black or white people according to their perception and characteristics historically attributed to the particular race. In this way, Morrison also eradicates prejudices regarding black and white people, as readers are inclined to feel compassion for white Margaret or dislike for black Jadine, forming their opinion based on the characters' actions rather than their race. Conversing about Morrison's characters, Terry Otten makes a perceptive comment: "Furthermore, she creates black characters fully capable of moral choice. The whiteness she castigates represents the dehumanizing cultural values of a society given over to profit, possession, and dominance. It is a whiteness worn by blacks as well as whites" (1989: 96). In *Tar Baby*, being white is related to the negative qualities of materialism, disregard for tradition and culture, and selfishness, and Jadine displays these qualities to a more considerable extent than Margaret does, despite their skin color. Due to Jadine's behavior, Son calls her white, wishing to emphasize that her actions

do not match her race. Morrison further adds to the discussion of race: “It seems that it has a utility far beyond economy, beyond the sequestering of classes from one another, and has assumed a metaphorical life so completely embedded in daily discourse that it is perhaps more necessary and more on display than ever before” (1993: 63). In the metaphorical sense, race seems to have also obtained the status of exoticism and peculiarity, as illustrated by Jadine’s doubt whether Ryk wishes to marry her for her race or because he genuinely loves her.

Tessa Roynon opens new spaces for critical inquiry by emphasizing the significance of issues that exist among the members of the same race: “This speaks to Morrison’s central concern in the novel: to explore and deplore the ideological clashes, the mutual misunderstandings, and the acts of intraracial violence and betrayal…” (2013: 39). Black people in the novel differ in many ways, especially when it comes to their social class, education, and level of appreciation of cultural heritage and history. Moreover, they seem to be aware of these differences. Sydney and Ondine believe in racial hierarchies between races and within the same race; they are offended that Valerian treats Son better than them, thinking they occupy a higher social position than him. In addition to this, when they find out that Valerian fired Yardman and Mary for stealing apples, Sydney makes a vicious comment: “Other folks steal and they get put in the guest room” (Morrison 1981: 204), expressing his disapproval of treating somebody who is black and poor in a thoughtful way. Apart from Sydney and Ondine, the Streets also seem to believe in the existence of racial hierarchies, as they behave toward Jadine on the one hand and Sydney and Ondine on another, in entirely different ways. Jadine enjoys all the privileges of the white world, she even has her room in L’Arbe de la Croix, and she sits with the Streets for the meals while the members of her own family live in the areas designated for servants wait on Jadine and the Streets, and worry about their future due to lack of financial means. Furthermore, Son and Jadine’s relationship displays the inability of two people of the same race to coexist due to their many differences. Because of their different social classes, financial and economic prospects, education, and general perspectives on life, Son and Jadine argue fiercely and even succumb to violence.

The splendid array of both white and black characters in the novel serves to draw attention to the idea that race is not solely related to the color of the skin, but more importantly, it is related to the cultural heritage and historical meaning that white and black people associate with the particular race. By juxtaposing Jadine and Son, Morrison shows two black people with differing attitudes toward their culture and ancestry. While Son respects and appreciates black history and culture, insisting that they are a necessary part of one’s identity, Jadine rejects this notion. When it comes to the exploration of Jadine’s personality, K.C. Lalthlamuani sheds light on the relevant observation: “Jadine lacks an inherent sense of herself as a black woman. Failing to make a connection with her past, her family, and her own femininity, she denies her racial identity” (2014: 135). Growing up without parents and being raised by white and black people whose primary concern was educating her end empowering her to be independent, Jadine has not had a chance to be surrounded by black cultural elements. Consequently, Jadine does not develop an appreciation for black cultural values, such as respect for an ancient heritage and a close-knit relationship with her family members. On her path toward individuation, Jadine considers education, financial means, and career success more significant than traditional black values.

Morrison portrays Jadine as a modern black woman who defies racial and gender stereotypes and who contradicts the historical image of a black woman. Jadine is independent, educated, beautiful, and self-confident; she possesses all the traits historically associated with white women only. Aoi Mori emphasizes the importance of the creation of such an influential female figure: “Black women, observed as doubly repressed victims to be sympathized with because of their race and gender, debunk the passive image of victimization produced by whites” (1999: 6). Jadine is not victimized due to her race and gender, and in this way, she

symbolizes a contemporary woman who breaks free from historical constraints that prevented black women from achieving their goals in the past. However, in her pursuit of success and independence, Jadine neglects one of the critical aspects when it comes to one's identity development – the appreciation of cultural heritage and history. Marilyn Sanders Mobley proposes that Morrison's primary concern in the novel is: "…the disparity Morrison sees between the women of her remembered past and the women of the present epitomized in the character of Jadine" (1993: 285). In her portrayal of Jadine, Morrison illustrates that modern black women might feel conflicted about how they should live their lives and whether they should follow their wishes or fulfill traditional expectations. Additionally, by juxtaposing Jadine and Son and their divergent opinions on black history and tradition, Morrison demonstrates the extreme ways in which they deal with heritage and ancestry by showing Son's total immersion in them and Jadine's complete negligence of them. Furthermore, Morrison depicts influences that Jadine is exposed to; Valerian and Son's views of what Jadine should do and how she should behave are opposite; while Valerian supports Jadine financially, wishing for her to fulfill her potential and succeed in the white world, Son wants Jadine to respect her tradition and ancestry and reject the white culture altogether. Taking the metaphor of the tar baby story into consideration, John N. Duvall believes that both Valerian and Son are trying to make Jadine a tar baby: "If Valerian has made Jadine a tar baby in one sense (a black woman more cathected to white culture than black), Son surely wishes to make her a tar baby in another (a nurturing black mama who will never ask to share a male authority or autonomy)" (2000: 111). Still, Valerian's influence that Jadine has been exposed to since she was a child proves to be more potent as Jadine eventually decides that the white world of Paris is more suitable for her than the black world of Eloe. In this regard, Morrison also juxtaposes Eloe on the one hand and Paris and New York on the other. Morrison shows Eloe as the place where only black people live, while in New York and Paris, people of different races coexist, thus illustrating Eloe as a place of limited educational and economic opportunities while in New York and Paris, people of any race might thrive and succeed.

Unlike the previous two novels, where Morrison excludes the white presence, *Tar Baby* tackles the interplay between two races, intending to depict racial dynamics in a world where discriminatory practices and racial stereotypes supposedly belong to the past. Philip Page sheds light on the multiracial context where Morrison places her novels: "Instead, she locates her novels in the play between the two races: the novels are about African-American experience *in* white-dominated America and about how that experience is defined by African Americans' historical and continuing relationships with whites" (2010: 91). By illustrating complex relationships between white and black people together with relationships among the black people, Morrison shows that historical circumstances have a perpetuating effect on the later generations of the black people and that their identity development is tightly connected to white people.

By including the white character of Margaret, Morrison shows that race, gender, and class affect the identity development of both white and black women. Elsa Barkley Brown makes an insightful observation: "The thinking and actions of white women, too, are shaped by their race and their class, and their consciousness are also formed by the totality of these factors" (2004: 58). While the exploration of identity development of black women in the novel is tightly related to gender, race, and class, Morrison also emphasizes that the same analysis should be applied when white female characters are taken into consideration. Even though Margaret seems to be at the top of racial and class hierarchies in comparison to other female characters in the novel, her race, class, and gender caused an identity crisis that encouraged Margaret to succumb to domestic violence and child abuse. Due to wealth and high social class, Margaret's inferior position to her husband, and her young age when she got married, Margaret was unable to find happiness as she was prevented from working, receiving higher education,

and even socializing with whom she wanted. All these factors led to boredom and unfulfilled life that forced Margaret to hurt her child in her pursuit of happiness and a sense of purpose. By including descriptions of a white woman's life struggles and identity crises, Morrison sheds light on universal issues that threaten female identity development, regardless of skin color.

5.2.4 Narratological perspective

In the exploration of the influence of racial, social, and historical factors on identity development, it is meaningful to comprehend how narrative form and techniques reflect the main topics of the novel. Morrison uses an omniscient narrator to tell the story and incorporates multiple points of view when describing characters, enabling readers to form their opinions of characters based on several perspectives. As Herbert William Rice mentions: "Morrison's novel contains so many shifts in perspective that we see most of the characters from various angles" (1996: 83). This narrative technique is very significant in Morrison's fiction, as it allows readers to see multiple sides to one's personality. For instance, when the character of Jadine is taken into consideration, Valerian sees Jadine as an up-and-coming model and art student who has a fantastic future ahead of her; Sydney and Ondine perceive her as a distant daughter who does not show enough appreciation for her family; Thérèse views her as a woman who has lost her ancient properties and who neglects her history and cultural heritage; Son, by falling in love with her, idealizes Jadine believing he could change her to fit into what he considers to be a proper black woman. On the other hand, Son is perceived as a black criminal by Margaret, Sydney, and Ondine, an intriguing young man by Valerian, and an attractive man by Jadine. As Elliott Butler-Evans notes: "Both Jadine and Son are shown from three perspectives: self-representation, descriptions and delineations by other characters in the novel, and mediations by an external narrator" (1989: 156). By offering several different perspectives, Morrison allows readers to make their impressions regarding characters but also illustrates that they have complex personalities and cannot be described simply and unambiguously.

Commenting on the narrative structure of *Tar Baby*, Joyce Hope Scott makes a relevant observation:

> First, it establishes an interracial dialogue that challenges white America's view and ordering of the world; and second, it gives voice to an intra-racial dialogue, which confronts a privileged black middle-class materialism with the vernacular discourse of the black folk community (2007: 26).

Joyce Hope Scott suggests that Morrison uses the narrative form of the novel to point to the binary oppositions between the black and white race but also to emphasize the differences among the members of the black race, challenging the traditional notion that differences only exist between black and white people. Furthermore, Morrison sheds light on the existence of social, racial, and class hierarchies, devoting attention to what Hope Scott described as "the dialogic interaction of the marginalized and the dominant" (2007: 33). By depicting Son and Jadine's turbulent relationship, Morrison places particular emphasis on the social and class hierarchies that persist among black people and that consequently categorize them into marginalized or dominant groups. The novel also unveils hierarchies as relative categories, as characters simultaneously appear dominant and marginalized depending on their environment. Therefore, Sydney and Ondine are inferior in comparison to Valerian as he is racially, socially, and financially superior to them, while they believe they occupy a higher position on a hierarchy in contrast to Son as he is socially and economically inferior to them. However, in the description of these hierarchies, Morrison emphasizes that these opinions regarding one's

superiority and inferiority are biased. For example, Son considers himself to be superior to the majority of the characters in the novel as he believes that honoring the history and cultural heritage should occupy the top position in any hierarchy, and he believes that all the people he meets at Isle des Chevaliers, except for Gideon and Thérèse, fall short of that criterion.

Understanding the narrative of *Tar Baby* as an attempt to pinpoint the binary oppositions that characterize both the characters and their lifestyles in the novel, Elliott Butler-Evans makes an incisive comment: "These patterns of opposition, the emphasis on differences generally, structure the narrative and determine its focus. Of equal significance is the manner in which characters and their ideological positions are presented" (1989: 154). Morrison juxtaposes black with white, higher social class with lower, wealth with poverty, Eloe with New York and Isle des Chevaliers, illustrating the importance of binary oppositions when it comes to one's identity development.

Furthermore, Hope Scott directs critical attention to the following notion: "The novel's various intersecting narratives represent an example of the assault of African American vernacular language on the ideological hegemony of Euro-American capitalism and its trend of exploitation of the Caribbean landscape and indigenous people" (2007: 34). Morrison intentionally incorporates both white and black people and different settings where the plot takes place to shed light on the historical context and exploitation of black people that persist despite the changed circumstances. It is also emphasized that a large number of black people (represented by Jadine, Sydney, and Ondine) seem not to be aware or at least not to pay attention to how white people take advantage of black people's labor. This is specially made evident by the scene in which Valerian informs the members of his household that he fired Gideon and Thérèse for stealing, and when Son is the only one disturbed over the news that they were fired for something that he believes they were entitled to.

Regarding the title of the story as the powerful tool that Morrison uses while narrating the plot, Carmen Gillespie explains the symbolism behind the tar baby story concerning race: "The novel uses the mythic image of the Tar Baby to evoke the flaws of racial stereotyping and to suggest the stickiness of authenticity. The image of the Tar Baby suggests a false front, a substitute for reality that all of the characters either confront or embrace" (2008: 208). Interpreted in this way, the attractiveness of the tar baby symbolizes the distance from cultural heritage and black history, and many characters in the novel find themselves unable to resist it. Jadine is perceived as inauthentic by Son and Thérèse, who value their heritage and tradition immensely.

With regard to the title of the novel, Maria DiBattista asserts:

> The title, then, not only announces a subject but issues a warning. We might read this caution as follows: reach out to this enigmatic presence that solicits you with its illusion of life; struggle to grasp this mute, inglorious image of blackness put in your path; grapple with it, chasten or reshape it, but don't expect to hold or subdue or destroy it (2005: 153).

DiBattista suggests that one should beware of the tar baby and characters that may represent the tar baby in the novel, as its image is very enticing but is impossible to change or control it. The notion leads to the inevitable conclusion that Jadine is the tar baby whose alluring presence captivates Son, who learns the hard way that he cannot control her. DiBattista also warns of "a power, however negative or dangerous, that should not be ignored or repudiated" (2005: 154). By stressing the idea of the powerful impact that the tar baby might have on people observing and approaching it, DiBattista implies that one should not underestimate the tar baby, regardless of how naïve it might appear to be.

As evident in the comprehensive explanations she provided for the first sentence of each novel she has written, Morrison considers the beginning of the novel to be of paramount importance. *Tar Baby* begins with the following words: “He believed he was safe” (Morrison 1981: 3), referring to Son’s arrival to Isle des Chevaliers. Pertaining to the reason why she decided to begin with this particular sentence, Morrison comments: “The unease about this view of safety is important because safety itself is the desire of each person in the novel. Locating it, creating it, losing it” (2019: 201). By choosing these words at the novel’s onset, Morrison suggests one of the main themes she explores – safety. While Son utters these words fearing for safety in the literal sense of the word, fearing for his personal safety, all the characters in the novel seem to search for safety in one way or another. Sydney and Ondine are worried about financial safety; Margaret is protective over the safety of her secret; Jadine is searching for emotional safety. On their path toward individuation, all the characters fear they will never reach the safety they long for.

Regarding the manipulation of linguistic means, it is relevant to mention the duality of the characters’ names. Carmen Gillespie elaborates on the symbolism behind Valerian’s name: “[…] he is named after the Roman emperor, Valerian. The emperor Valerian was largely unsuccessful and is perhaps best-known for his defeat and death at the hands of the Persians, who were considered by the Romans to be barbarians” (2008: 215). The name Valerian is infused with duality – of a powerful and authoritarian man and a man who failed terribly at fulfilling his role. This duality can be applied to both the emperor and Valerian Street, as they were both endowed with many privileges and yet they did not appropriately use them. When it comes to the dual significance of Jadine’s name, the long form of her name (Jadine, used by black people in the novel) and short form (Jade, used by white people) symbolizes the split of her personality along racial lines. Additionally, Son admits that he used several different fake names to conceal the truth about the crime that he had committed.

In the analysis of the narrative techniques that Morrison employs in the novel, it is imperative to take note of language dialects and variants that the characters speak. Discussing the importance and symbolism of spoken language, Yvonne Atkinson explains concisely: “Language is more than a form of communication: it reveals the concepts that shape the significance and legacy beyond the word itself. Language defines a culture’s style and method of looking at life and the individual’s place within that culture” (2000: 12). Language refers to much more than simple words that are selected when expressing one’s thoughts. The language that characters speak also relates to their background, social class, level of education, and appreciation of cultural and historical heritage. Morrison illustrates this in the novel by displaying differences among the language variants of the characters. The Streets and Jadine speak very similarly, showing highbrow ideas and superior social status. On the other hand, people in Eloe speak very differently, and Jadine claims that she cannot understand them properly. By juxtaposing Jadine’s speech with the speech of Eloe’s inhabitants, the novel highlights the differences among them; despite sharing the same skin color, they are very different when it comes to their education, job prospects, finances, social position, and worldview. Linda Hutcheon supports this claim by stating that the novel: “studies all three – class, racial, sexual power – in their wide range of manifestations and consequences, both present and historical. Language is once again shown to be a social practice, an instrument as much for manipulation and control as for humanist self-expression” (1988: 186). Language is an important aspect of self-definition, as it reveals significant pieces of information regarding one’s educational, economic, and social status. In many cases, language also reveals the place of origin, especially when geographical variants are considered. Simultaneously, language draws attention to the existence of hierarchies in the society; the formal, grammatically correct language that Valerian, Margaret, and Jadine speak gives the impression of social superiority,

while the colloquial language used in Eloe is associated with lower social class and lack of education.

Another important point worthy of discussion when narratological devices are taken into consideration is magical realism, as Morrison's work is often associated with it. In *Tar Baby*, Morrison incorporates elements of magical realism when describing mythical aspects of the black culture: the mysterious story about blind inhabitants of Isle des Chevaliers, Jadine's dream about the naked black women, and Son's arrival to the island at the end of the novel. Discussing the reasons why Morrison uses magical realism in her fiction, Denise Heinze explains in great detail:

> But Morrison's ultimate purpose in using the supernatural in art is not to prove its existence – her novels intentionally represent it ambiguously – but to create this ongoing dialectic between the seen and the unseen, the known and the unknowable, the signified and the Signified – the supernatural as a trope on reality (1993: 160).

Morrison does not contemplate the truthfulness of the novel's mysterious events and mythical stories; she narrates them in the same way that she narrates the factual events. However, the characters' attitudes towards the magical elements of narration reveal their attitude toward black history and culture.

Standing in stark contrast to mythical and magical images are brutally vivid portrayals of child abuse and domestic violence. By depicting these events grotesquely, Audrey L. Vinson believes that Morrison "expands her interest in extreme circumstances dealt by society" (1985: 13). Morrison describes taboo topics without embellishment, drawing attention to social reality. By describing in great detail the wounds that Margaret inflicted on Michael, *Tar Baby* points to the consequences that unhappy marriages and young, immature mothers might cause. Furthermore, images of domestic violence against Jadine, her willingness to stay with Son despite his verbal and physical assaults, as well as the delayed reaction of the police, speak volumes about the significant issue of domestic violence in the 1980s.

Moreover, the climax of the novel, the most heated interracial and intra-racial arguments that result in the revelation of dark secrets, resentment, and conflict, occurs during the Christmas dinner. What is supposed to be a joyous occasion turns into the disclosure of the characters' true personalities and secrets: Margaret's abuse of Michael, Ondine's honest opinion of Margaret, Valerian's attitude toward servants, Son's opinion regarding the interracial relationships, Jadine's feelings toward Son.

Finally, in the same manner, as in the previously discussed novels, Morrison ends *Tar Baby* ambiguously, not informing the readers about what happens with the inhabitants of L'Arbe de la Croix, whether Son joins the blind dwellers on the island or not, whether Jadine continues her relationship with Ryk. Therefore, readers are free to interpret the novel's ending using their imagination and reaching individual conclusions.

5.2.5 Literary trauma studies and psychoanalytical perspective

Investigating the impact of collective and individual traumas the characters experienced offers valuable insight into critical aspects that interfere with the individuation process. While the collective historical trauma of black people's ordeal should be shared among all the black characters, the novel proves this is not true. Son, Gideon, and Thérèse all feel distrust toward white people, unable to forget their past affairs. Son profoundly believes that the only

relationships between white and black people should be work-related and that all other personal, intimate relationships should not be allowed. Although Son was not personally affected by the painful history of black people, he feels compassion and a sense of duty as he feels very connected to the overall black community. On the other hand, Jadine, despite being aware of black history and being black herself, does not dwell on the past, believing that interracial issues are long gone, and does not mind engaging in social relationships with white people. When it comes to remembering historical traumas, Ron Eyerman argues: "[…] collective forgetting is as important as collective remembering for a society's self-reflection; it is in fact the role of youth or the new generation: to provide society with a fresh look at itself" (2003: 11). According to Eyerman's interpretation, Son and Jadine mirror the society's attitudes toward black history, illustrating that younger generations of black people do not value historical context in the same manner. Son and Jadine's differing opinions about black history result from different circumstances in which they grew up and different values that they were exposed to in the years that are crucial for identity development. While Son grew up in an all-black town and was surrounded by elements of black history and culture, Jadine was raised in an interracial environment, enjoying the privileges that were typically denied to black people, such as expensive education and a wealthy lifestyle.

Apart from the collective historical trauma that black characters inherit from their ancestors, all the characters, regardless of the color of their skin, suffer through individual traumas that have an overwhelming influence on their identity development. One of the most vividly depicted ones is the traumatic experience of violence. In this way, Son is portrayed as a stereotyped black man, inflicting physical and psychological violence on both his ex-wife and girlfriend, Jadine. In moments of anger and desperation, when Son discovers his wife's unfaithfulness, he crashes his car into the house and accidentally murders her. When he talks about the death of his wife, Son insists that it was an accident and that he had no intention of hurting her. However, his aggressive behavior is undoubtedly intentional when it comes to his relationship with Jadine. He abuses her physically and psychologically on numerous occasions until she reaches the breaking point and leaves him. By portraying repeated images of violence, Jadine's voluntary decision to stay with Son despite his behavior, and the late response of the police, Morrison depicts a gloomy picture of domestic violence in the 1980s.

Another instance of violent behavior that resulted in psychological childhood trauma is Margaret's abuse of her son Michael. Margaret's young age and lack of life experience and preparedness to be a wife and mother made her abuse the only person that was younger and weaker than her in her household. Michael was exposed to what Judith Herman terms "prolonged, repeated trauma" (1992: 74), as he could not escape and/or complain about the violent environment he was exposed to. Herman describes the nature of the relationship between a victim and victimizer in case of such a traumatic event: "Captivity, which brings the victim into prolonged contact with the perpetrator, creates a special type of relationship, one of coercive control" (1992: 74). As Margaret was unable to take control of any other aspect of her life (her whereabouts and social interactions were managed and directed by Valerian), she found comfort and happiness when displaying control over her son.

Furthermore, Margaret's behavior toward her son also reveals that she was going through severe trauma of isolation. Margaret's actions were caused by her total alienation from her family, friends, the town where she lived, and the whole life that was familiar to her. Herman Beavers addresses this kind of trauma as a "tight place" by stating: "As I conceptualize it, tight space signals a character's spiritual and emotional estrangement from community and the way it inhibits their ability to sustain a meaningful relationship to place" (2018: 6). After getting married to Valerian, Margaret abandons her home town, family and friends and begins a new lonely life that she does not fit in. She finds her only companion in Ondine, but Valerian believes maintaining friendships with servants is inappropriate and ends it. After this incident,

Margaret cannot establish a harmonious and loving relationship with anyone. Aware of her reprehensible actions, Margaret guards her secret. Cathy Caruth reveals the implications of such an act: “The traumatized, we might say, carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess” (1995: 5). Margaret’s unwillingness to share her secret with anyone turns her into a bitter woman who spends most of her time alone, obsessing over her son and wishing to compensate for the time she has lost with him now that he is an adult. Until the moment she is forced to own up to her actions and mistakes, Margaret considers herself to be a victim of her husband, of being encouraged to get married young, of living on Isle des Chevaliers; simultaneously unwilling to accept the role of the victimizer in her relationship with her son.

Child abuse was not only a traumatizing experience for Michael but also for his father, Valerian, once he discovered the truth. Valerian becomes traumatized because he feels guilty of what Morrison terms as "the crime of innocence” (Morrison 1981: 242), of not being aware of the events in his own house impacting his own family, and of neglecting the subtle signs that his son was sending out to him. Valerian’s thoughts reveal his innermost feelings: “And there was something so foul in that, something in the crime of innocence so revolting it paralyzed him. He had not known because he had not taken the trouble to know” (Morrison 1981: 242). Living up to the duality that his name symbolizes, Valerian appears as a successful, wealthy man in control of his business, while he fails at his roles of a father and a husband, utterly ignorant of the feelings and actions of his family members.

When exploring the problematics of traumatic experiences and their influence on one’s identity construction, it seems crucial to focus on cultural trauma that is presented in the novel as the loss of ancient properties. Ron Eyerman defines the term: “[…] cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion” (2003: 2). Jadine suffers from cultural trauma even though she does not seem to be aware of it. Due to her upbringing and the strong white presence in her life, Jadine has not developed an appreciation for black cultural tradition. While Jadine does not believe that black history and heritage have any major significance in her lifestyle, Son considers the black tradition crucial to one’s personality. However, as much as Jadine believes that her ancestry is irrelevant to her, several strange occurrences prove her wrong. Jadine is very disturbed by the image of the woman wearing a yellow dress she encounters in the Parisian supermarket, aware that this woman is the embodiment of black features. Additionally, when she travels to Eloe with Son, she is deeply traumatized by the dream she has when all the black women she has known or heard of appear naked, proudly showing off their bodies. Finally, the impact of disregard for traditional values is best evident in Sydney and Ondine’s disappointment in Jadine when she refuses to take care of them in their hour of need, as taking care of the elderly is one of the proudest characteristics of black tradition. However, as Jadine is not aware of her cultural trauma, she never even attempts to tackle it and recover from it.

According to Bessel A. Van Der Kolk and Onno Van Der Hart’s analysis, it is necessary to verbalize the traumatic experience in order to reach the road to trauma recovery:

> Traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language. It appears that, in order for this to occur successfully, the traumatized person has to return to the memory often in order to complete it (1995: 176).

Once Margaret can share her secret with Valerian, she transforms completely – she feels happy and liberated, smiles often, starts taking care of her husband, and enjoys Isle des Chevaliers. Most importantly, she accepts her guilt and takes responsibility for her actions, thus being able to freely talk about the traumatic experience she has lived through and the one she caused to her son. Although it is difficult for Valerian to hear about the unfortunate events happening in his house and to members of his own family, he observes the change in Margaret: "She seemed strong to him. He was wasting away, filed to nothing by grief, and she was strong, stronger" (Morrison 1981: 237). The revelation of Margaret's secret brought about the reversal of their household roles; now, Margaret is the one who is in control of the house and Valerian's actions, while he is the submissive one.

Furthermore, Kai Erikson reveals another benefit of verbalizing traumatic experiences and sharing them with others: "Still, trauma shared can serve as a source of communality in the same way that common languages and common backgrounds can. There is a spiritual kinship there, a sense of identity, even when feelings of affection are deadened and the ability to care numbed" (1995: 186). When Margaret owns up to her actions, the social aspect of her personality reawakens, as she now wishes to restore her friendship with Ondine. In her attempt to do so, she asks Ondine for forgiveness, but Ondine shares words of wisdom with Margaret when she says: "You forgive you. Don't ask for more" (Morrison 1981: 241). Ondine draws attention to the perhaps most significant step on the road to recovery from the traumatic experience, self-forgiveness. Only when Margaret can truly forgive herself can she make substantial progress in overcoming her trauma.

5.3 Female characters' identity crises

5.3.1 Jadine

In the creation of Jadine's character, Morrison introduces a contemporary black woman who is not held back by the adverse circumstances of black history and who has the same privileges and benefits that white women do and that were denied to black women until then. In Nicole N. Aljoe's words: "A model and art history graduate student at the Sorbonne studying cloisonné, Jadine is Morrison's image of the new Black woman" (2003: 81). Jadine is a beautiful, educated, and self-sufficient young woman. She is very committed to accomplishing her goal of becoming successful, to the extent that she neglects her background and traditions as she considers them inferior to the Western ones.

Jadine is going through an identity crisis in the novel due to conflicting aspects of her identity. Jadine feels her personality is split along binary oppositions: black and white, appreciation and neglect of black history and heritage, commitment to family and alienation from them, Isle des Chevaliers and Paris, Ryk and Son. Jadine's journey toward self-discovery is marked by her struggles to decide which world she belongs to: the privileged, wealthy white world or the poor community of her black ancestry.

Jadine's life has been marked with duality since her childhood; she was orphaned as a young girl, as her father died when she was two, and her mother passed away when she was twelve, her aunt and uncle raised her, while the white people they worked for participated in Jadine's upbringing and provided financial means for her education. Carmen Gillespie explains the problematics lurking behind these circumstances: "…Jadine epitomizes the difficulty of finding both house and home. Jadine's education teaches her to dismiss aspects of black culture that would help her to negotiate the complexities of her life as an upwardly mobile black woman" (2008: 217). Due to her education and close ties to the Streets, Jadine often identifies with white people, showing greater interest in and appreciation of white culture and traditions

than black heritage. However, she does not deny her black ancestry; she is aware of the color of her skin, even admitting it gives her an exotic look that is advantageous to her modeling career, and she gets offended when Son calls her "white." Jadine wishes to escape categorization as she believes race should not be inextricably linked with history and culture. With respect to Jadine's viewpoint, Aimee L. Pozorski makes a relevant observation: "Conflicted by what constituted whiteness and Blackness, Jadine wants to be categorized as neither white nor Black, but as her singular self completely separated from the pressures of racial denomination" (2003: 282). Jadine wishes for others to perceive her in the same way that she perceives herself – independently of racial categorization. However, she fails to realize that one's identity is tightly linked to cultural and historical ancestry, which is one of the main reasons why she experiences an identity crisis and confusion regarding her future path in life. Aoi Mori pinpoints Jadine's state of confusion: "She is a cultural orphan without knowledge of her parents, her roots and the past, oscillating restlessly between the African-American and White worlds" (1999: 40). The fragmentation of Jadine's identity originates from both the circumstances and her reaction toward them. On the one hand, Jadine fits in the white standards of beauty due to her fair complexion, and she fits in the white intellectual circles due to her academic education, but on the other hand, she also fits in the black community due to her background and family members. However, while the white community is more than happy to claim her as one of her own, the black community criticizes her, emphasizing the urgent need for Jadine to acknowledge her racial identity. Fragmentation of Jadine's personality testifies to K.C. Lalthlamuani's shrewd conclusion: "Jadine wants to construct her own identity as she cannot identify herself with the people of her own race" (2014: 142). Realizing that she is very different from Ondine, the woman in the yellow dress, and the women from Eloe, Jadine decides to work on her self-definition far away from everybody's influences and opinions, in Paris, where she is free to live her life on her terms.

Elliott Butler-Evans believes that one should move past the obvious issues of racial identity and pay attention to "a serious Black feminist issue: the need for Black women to construct their own identities without having to submit to a dominant myth of racial authenticity" (1989: 157). Perhaps the character of Jadine serves to emphasize the issues surrounding the lives of modern black women, as they find themselves unable to integrate into the white world with constant scrutiny and criticism of the black community. Consequently, contemporary black women might experience an identity crisis and question their self-identity in an attempt to reconcile their wishes and the community's approval, which proves to be impossible in Jadine's case.

Lauren Lepow suggests that Morrison breaks new ground by portraying such an unusual protagonist: "Yet Jadine is problematic as a hero. Part of the problem is that she defies our stereotype of the black woman as hero. We are accustomed to the heroic black woman who is deprived, downtrodden, who triumphs against enormous odds" (1997: 177). Jadine is different from other female characters discussed in this dissertation primarily because she is privileged; she is privileged in her physical appearance, social class, education, job prospects, and financial means. Additionally, she is not discriminated against by the white people, they even want to socialize with her, and the white man Ryk wants to marry her.

Despite her description of Jadine as a complex character with both positive and negative aspects of her personality, Morrison praises her by saying: "She is New World black and New World woman extracting choice from choicelessness, responding inventively to found things. Improvisational. Daring, disruptive, imaginative, modern, out-of-the-house, outlawed, unpolicing, uncontained, and uncontainable" (2019: 196). Jadine is brave and self-confident, motivated and ambitious, and despite all the privileges she is offered, she makes excellent use of them in her attempt to become a successful and independent woman. These qualities also set her apart from typical black women of her time, such as Ondine and Thérèse. Moreover,

Jadine refuses constraints of any kind; she defies racial, sexual, and spatial limitations as she enjoys being free. Susan Willis believes that "…Morrison defines and tests the limits of individual freedom" (1993: 318). Freedom proves to be a relative category in the novel as the freedom that Jadine wishes to acquire is frowned upon by the black community. Jadine longs for liberation from cultural and historical ties to her black ancestry and familial obligations that are common in black tradition and require younger generations to care for elderly relatives. Insistence on this kind of freedom is considered to be disrespectful by Son, Ondine, Sydney, and Thérèse, the black people who take great pride in maintaining traditional values.

In the exploration of the identity development of female characters in Morrison's novels, it is noteworthy to draw parallels between Jadine and the protagonists from the previously discussed novels. Gurleen Grewal makes a valid comparison between Jadine and Pecola with regard to beauty standards:

> Pecola is convinced she is ugly because evidence is everywhere; on billboards, in the eyes of black and white adults, within the home and outside it. Jadine has no doubt she is beautiful because the evidence lies in the cover of *Elle* flaunting her face. But Jadine is no more self-defined than Pecola (2010: 205).

When juxtaposing Pecola and Jadine, the conclusion can be reached that much has changed when it comes to beauty standards in the predominantly white society over the period of 40 years. Although it can be assumed based on the textual evidence that Jadine is lighter when it comes to her skin color than Pecola, the fact is that Jadine is a black woman who is considered so beautiful that she occupies the cover pages of prominent fashion magazines, and attracts the attention of both white and black people everywhere she goes. This proves that beauty standards have transformed tremendously. Furthermore, when Jadine and Sula are taken into consideration, many similarities between them can be observed. They are both seeking independence outside of black communities, and they both disregard black history and cultural heritage. However, significant improvements in societal reactions can be noticed. While Sula was considered an outcast and was severely criticized and ostracized by the black community, Jadine is accepted for who she is. Some people in Jadine's life, like her aunt and uncle, do not approve of her choices and lifestyle, and while they tell her their opinion, they do not impose their viewpoints on her and do not deprive her of love and support. Therefore, by depicting Jadine, Morrison shows that society's attitudes toward a black female have progressed.

In her comparison of Jadine and Sula, Andrea O'Reilly observes another similarity: "I suggest that both Sula and Jadine's fears about sexuality and intimacy – Jadine doesn't want to lose control/Sula doesn't want to get involved is the same thing – and their rejections of motherhood stem from the loss of their mothers and their disconnection from the motherline" (2004: 70). O'Reilly believes that Jadine and Sula's relationships with their mothers have a dominant influence on the momentous decisions regarding their romantic and family lives. Both Jadine and Sula failed to establish meaningful bonds with their mothers; Jadine's mother passed away when she was very young, while Sula's mother has never made an effort to form a close connection with her daughter. Consequently, both women seem to be uninterested in starting their own families.

When investigating Jadine's path toward individuation, it is essential to mention the relationships with her partners and the impact these relationships have had on her identity construction. Upon arriving at Isle des Chevaliers, Jadine was engaged in a romantic relationship with a white man, Ryk, who lived in Paris. At that moment, Jadine's mind was fraught with doubts about whether she should marry Ryk as she was not sure whether he wanted to be with her for the right reasons; she assumed he was having an affair, and she wondered if

he only wanted to be with her because of her physical appearance that could be described as exotic. Jadine feared this because she was aware that, while she did have the physical features of a black girl, she lacked the accompanying appreciation of cultural values and traditions:

> And if it isn't me he wants, but any black girl who looks like me, talks and acts like me, what will happen when he finds out that I hate ear hoops, that I don't have to strengthen my hair, that Mingus puts me to sleep, that sometimes I want to get out of my skin and be only the person inside – not American – not black – just me? (Morrison 1981: 48)

Jadine reveals that she feels very insecure about her cultural and racial identity; she feels bothered that she does not honestly care for her black heritage and that she would be frowned upon because of this. Jadine wishes to be valued as a human being, far from all racial, ethnic, and cultural designations.

It is worthy of critical attention to compare the difference in communal attitudes toward Jadine and Sula regarding their relationship with white men. While Sula is vehemently condemned for her actions, people in Jadine's life do not seem concerned about her partners' race; Sydney and Ondine disapprove of Son even though he is black. This example also illustrates how the societal outlook on interracial relationships has improved.

By depicting a very intense and violent relationship between Son and Jadine, the novel suggests that problems arising in their relationship are related to culture and class rather than gender. By portraying Son and Jadine, Morrison exemplifies the issues in romantic relationships of the twentieth century: "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" (1993: 404). Son and Jadine did not perform gender roles in a traditional patriarchal way; Jadine was the one who was earning money and providing for them financially, and Son was not disturbed by it. Son was bothered by Jadine's close relationship with white people and neglect of black tradition. Morrison further states the causes of Son and Jadine's disagreements: "But they had a problem about what work to do, when and where to do it, and where to live. Those things hinged on what they felt about who they were, and what their responsibilities were in being black. The question for each was whether he or she was really a member of the tribe" ("An Interview with Toni Morrison" 1993: 404). Son and Jadine had conflicting interests and points of view regarding their preferred lifestyles and plans for the future. Additionally, racial identity and appreciation of black history and culture were extremely important to Son, who tried to shape Jadine into the perfect black girl he dreamed of.

Despite the differences that both of them were completely aware of, Son and Jadine fell madly in love with each other. When she first met him, Jadine felt disgusted by Son's demeanor, but gradually he awakened a particular feeling within her: "He had jangled something in her that was so repulsive, so awful, and he had managed to make her feel that the thing that repelled her was not in him, but in her. That was why she was ashamed" (Morrison 1981: 123). Faced with Son's authenticity, Jadine became aware of her flawed personality in relation to black history and culture. Jadine claims she felt happy with Son, who "unorphaned her completely" (Morrison 1981: 229). While in New York, the couple enjoyed each other's company, was not bothered by financial struggles, and shared their deepest secrets. They were isolated from the real world, including their families, obligations, and jobs. However, visiting Eloe forced them to face their differences and opinions about the future. Spending time in Eloe was unbearable for Jadine, so she returned to New York without Son, even though his absence hurt her terribly: "On the fifth day, she was feeling orphaned again" (Morrison 1981: 260). When Son eventually

returned from Eloe, they started fighting and abusing each other, both physically and verbally. It suddenly became clear to Jadine that Son would not change, and their differences were too vast to ignore, so she decided to leave him. Julie Cary Nerad pointedly remarks: "She recognizes that she and Son are both black but believes they are from disparate worlds, divided by class and defined by gender" (2006: 833). Despite being members of the same race, which should entail a plethora of similar characteristics, Jadine realizes that she and Son are incompatible due to several social, class, and cultural differences that they have been unable to overcome. Trudier Harris recognizes the masculine features of Jadine's personality in her act of abandoning Son: "Her ability to detach herself emotionally, to claim her destiny for herself, becomes almost masculine in the trickster analogy. She keeps the center of value focused upon herself and is therefore never seriously threatened by Son;" (1991: 126). Jadine was able to break free from her unhealthy relationship because of her background and personality traits. Her emotional detachment can be understood when one considers her painful childhood in which she lost both her parents, and her isolated life in Paris, far away from her relatives. Therefore, Jadine displays selfishness in her demeanor toward Son; in Harris's words, "she forms a community of one, complete unto herself" (1991: 126), as she does not see any benefits to maintaining the relationship any longer.

Taking the symbolic meaning of the title story into consideration, Keith E. Byerman makes a relevant point: "Jade and Son serve as tarbabies for each other. Their contact with each other and the attachment of each to what the other represents denies them the freedom to pursue the goal which is truest for each of them" (1993: 120). As much as Jadine and Son are drawn to each other, the fact is that their relationship places them into a state of stagnation and phlegmatic attitudes toward everyone and everything outside of their romance. Jadine neglected her modeling career and education and reduced contact with her family; Son did everything Jadine asked of him without pursuing his goals. Interpreted in this way, the tar baby could be a symbol for both of them, as each of them attracted the other one and kept them from their desired paths in life.

Jadine's disregard for black history and her rejection of black tradition and cultural heritage plays a significant role in her journey toward self-discovery and can be listed as the main reasons why Jadine suffers from an identity crisis. Andrea O'Reilly succinctly presents the identity issues that Morrison draws attention to: "The moral story or fable that *Tar Baby* tells is specifically gendered: a woman, Jadine, rejects the ancient properties of traditional black womanhood and adopts the values of the dominant white culture" (2004: 64). Jadine identifies with white culture because she enjoys all the privileges that are typically offered to white girls, such as studying at a prestigious university in Paris, working as a fashion model, living a wealthy lifestyle. Jadine's privileged social and class position and the lack of black role models who could educate her on her heritage and tradition account for her rejection of black culture.

When discussing the elements of black culture, Jadine believes that she should not admire them simply because of her race. In her conversation with Valerian, Jadine comments: "Picasso *is* better than an Itumba mask. The fact that he was intrigued by them is the proof of *his* genius, not the mask-makers" (Morrison 1981: 74). However, K. Zauditu-Selassie believes that Jadine's remark reflects her ignorance about the cultural significance of black artworks: "Her insistence that Pablo Picasso, who duplicated and merely imitated African masks, has more value than the originator represents her shallow understanding of the trope of black creative genius and its allegiance to autonomous black values" (2009: 105). Jadine's comment points to her unwillingness to make an effort to educate herself on the subject of black culture before discussing its irrelevance. Jadine seems to embrace the white tradition without even taking into consideration the cultural elements of the black community that she is a part of.

However, Jadine experiences an identity crisis and severe questioning of her life choices when she encounters a woman wearing a yellow dress in the Parisian supermarket who spits when she looks at Jadine. Eleanor W. Traylor provides the reason why Jadine develops feelings of insecurity and inferiority after the incident: "In this woman, Jadine catches a glimpse of an essence, a beauty, an assurance, a womanliness, an indwelling elegance, a nurture, an authenticity that she had never known before and certainly not achieved" (1988: 141). The woman in the supermarket epitomizes an authentic black woman, proud of her black features and tradition, utterly aware of her ancient properties. Jadine's emotional reaction to the woman in the supermarket was astounding and unusual: "She couldn't figure out why the woman's insulting gesture had derailed her – shaken her out of proportion to incident. Why she had wanted that woman to like and respect her" (Morrison 1981: 47). The sight of the black woman and her action completely shatter Jadine's world, as she starts questioning her decisions, such as whether she should marry Ryk, and decides to visit her relatives in Isle des Chevaliers, hoping that this change of scenery would help her with her doubts. Andrea O'Reilly makes an insightful observation when it comes to Jadine's identity crisis: "Significantly, the crisis of self-definition caused by the sight of the yellow woman is configured in racial terms" (2004: 66). Although Jadine and the woman in the yellow dress are both black women, the level of their identification with black culture is not the same. If we consider Jadine's clothes, education, opinions, and values, she is a white woman. On the other hand, the woman in the yellow dress embodies a dignified and proud black woman who looks down on women like Jadine, who have clearly forgotten their ancient properties.

Another extremely important aspect of black tradition that Jadine rejects is caring for elderly relatives. Sydney, Ondine, and Son all criticize her for her selfishness in this regard, as the black culture requires younger generations to return the favor and provide care and financial support for the elderly members of the family. However, as Gurleen Grewal explains, Jadine does not plan to fulfill these traditional expectations: "What she *is* liberated from is responsibility to her aged aunt and uncle, her culture, her history, all of which is burdensome and restrictive to her" (2010: 215). By her insistence on not taking care of Sydney and Ondine, Jadine displays characteristics similar to Sula, as they both disrespect communal values. Ondine attempts to explain to Jadine that honoring cultural heritage, history, and tradition are important factors when it comes to the development of one's identity: "A daughter is a woman that cares about where she come from and takes care of them that took care of her" (Morrison 1981: 281). As these words are directed at an adult Jadine, whose standpoint regarding the black tradition has already been formed, they do not seem to have much impact. Jadine replies to Ondine: ""There are other ways to be a woman, Nanadine," Jadine went on. "Your way is one, I guess it is, but it's not my way. I don't want to be… like you" (Morrison 1981: 281). Although Sydney and Ondine raised her, Jadine does not seem to consider them role models, and she does not look up to them. Jadine especially does not appreciate their expectations that she should take care of them as a return favor for bringing her up and helping her achieve her goals.

Morrison demonstrates the actual extent of Jadine and Son's incompatibility when they travel together to Eloe. Eloe is a patriarchal, all-black town where everyone is interested in Jadine, and where Son's father does not allow the couple to sleep in the same house. On her first night in Eloe, Jadine undressed as she was used to sleeping naked, but Son's aunt, Rosa, gave her a nightgown to sleep in, considering her nakedness unacceptable. This act made Jadine very uncomfortable: "No man had made her feel that naked, that unclothed" (Morrison 1981: 253). Since Jadine refused to stay in Eloe longer, Son sneaked in to sleep beside her. However, this breaking of patriarchal rules of Eloe resulted in Jadine's nightmare where she saw the images of Cheyenne (Son's ex-wife), Son's deceased mother, Rosa, Thérèse, Ondine, her mother, the woman in a yellow dress, all watching her and showing her their breasts, except

for the woman in a yellow dress who was showing her the eggs she bought in the supermarket. This nightmare that appeared very real to Jadine deeply disturbed her as these naked black women made her feel inauthentic. When interpreting Jadine's dream, it is noteworthy to mention Morrison's conclusion regarding Jadine: "She is not afraid of the male world, but she is afraid of the female world" ("Toni Morrison" 1994: 106). Jadine feels uncomfortable in the presence of women, notably black women. Morrison further describes women like Jadine: "They are beautiful and they are competent, but when they get with women whose values are different and who judge competence in different areas, they are extremely threatened. It's not just class; it's a different kind of woman" ("Toni Morrison" 1994: 106). Although Jadine belongs to the same race and gender as the women from her dream, she is aware that she is strikingly different from them, especially in terms of appreciation of black history and culture and level of identification with white people. It is essential to observe that Jadine envies the woman in the yellow dress and Son for their authenticity and blackness, even though she does not wish to be like that herself.

In connection with Jadine's indifference toward black heritage and Thérèse's statement that she has forgotten her ancient properties, La Vinia Delois Jennings claims: "Jadine has not forgotten her ancient properties; she has never known them" (2008: 126). Since Jadine was not educated on the subject of black history and cultural tradition while she was growing up, she has not had a chance to understand them, and black heritage has never become an important aspect of her identity. On the other hand, Lauren Lepow disagrees with Jennings's comment by saying: "On the contrary, Jade may also know her true properties – or come to know them – but she refuses to be limited by anyone's else definition of what they are" (1997: 178). Another interpretation could be that Jadine possesses knowledge of important values that her ancestry comprises but that she simply chooses to identify with white tradition, as she believes that her personal opinions and values are closer to the western world.

Morrison depicts Jadine as a modern black woman who, in the process of acquiring an education and building a career, disregards her tradition. Therefore, the question arises: if a black woman pursues her goals and achieves success, does she consequently disregard her ancestry? Morrison clarifies her intentions with the creation of the Jadine character: "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 harbour"" ("A Conversation with Toni Morrison" 1994: 135). Morrison emphasizes that she believes in the evolution of black women regarding their educational and career aspirations but that black women should simultaneously honor and respect their origin and tradition, as this could be the way to avoid the identity crisis Jadine experiences. According to Morrison, "There's no reason for her to be like Ondine – I'm not recommending that – but she needs a little bit of Ondine to be a complete woman" ("Toni Morrison" 1994: 104). Considering Jadine's reaction to the woman in the yellow dress, people living in Eloe, and her nightmare, it appears clear that interference with Jadine's individuation process was formed due to increased awareness that she neglected black history and cultural heritage. Addressing this issue, Carolyn Denard explains: "The point of these confrontations Morrison emphasizes is not to criticize Jadine for her accomplishments, but to caution women such as her not to forget the positive connections that they have to the women of their ethnic past" (1988: 175). Denard suggests that Morrison draws attention to the potential dangers that might interfere with identity development. Morrison also pinpoints the significance of tradition and ancestry that should not be neglected even when closely related to the white influence. She also suggests that a modern woman should achieve many goals: "There should be lots of things: there should be a quality of adventure and a quality of nest" (1994: 104). By stating this, Morrison implies that none of the female characters in the novel is a complete woman; while Jadine fulfilled the educational, social, class, and career aspirations of modern black women, she neglected the cultural aspect

of her identity; on the other hand, while women in Eloe take great pride in their appreciation of culture and tradition, they are unable to make economic and financial progress due to their insistence on ancestry and refusal to blend into the white tradition that offers educational and job opportunities.

Although Morrison criticizes Jadine for her disregard for ancient properties, she does illustrate a positive side to it: since Jadine is not preoccupied with the black tradition, she also seems not to be preoccupied with the past, as she is entirely focused on the present moment. In her conversation with Son, Jadine says: "There is nothing any of us can do about the past but make our own lives better, that's all I've been trying to help you do" (Morrison 1981: 271). Jadine believes that dwelling on the past is futile; Son's fixation on the past does not allow him to move on with his life and achieve greater success in both his professional and private life. On the contrary, while Jadine's engrossment in the present moment proves to be very beneficial for her education and job opportunities, it also means that she completely neglects an important aspect of her personality: her ancestry and tradition.

Upon analysis of Jadine's character, Sandra Pouchet Paquet brings an important fact to the fore: "At twenty-five, Jadine is vain, narcissistic, spoiled, but very much about the business of shaping her own identity. Morrison warns that self-reliance in itself is not enough" (1997: 202). Jadine's alienation from the black community and her identification with white people pose a cultural threat when it comes to her identity development. As much as Jadine longs for independence, she realizes that she must come back to Isle des Chevaliers and reunite with her family to make decisions about her future. Discussing Jadine's isolation, Trudier Harris comments: "Jadine is not only an outlaw in a world where male outlaws are more readily tolerated than female ones, but she is a communal and familial outlaw, not a societal one" (1991: 129). Harris made an important observation that Jadine is not socially alienated; Jadine seems to fit in the white world perfectly, the world comprised of wealthy and educated people and a cosmopolitan elite. However, Jadine is a communal outcast, as she does not share beliefs and values with the black community, and does not display the appropriate respect for her family members according to black standards.

As previously mentioned, it is important to emphasize the significance of the spatial aspect when it comes to Jadine's identity development. Throughout the novel, Jadine travels to many places, from Paris to Isle des Chevaliers, New York, and Eloe, eventually returning to Paris again. These geographical areas profoundly impact her life and shed light on different aspects of her personality. Jadine in Paris and New York is a confident, glamorous, and attractive girl who dominates these cities with her beauty and self-assurance, while Jadine in Eloe is an insecure and anxious individual who feels that she does not belong there. Jadine feels the urgent need to escape from Eloe to New York as, according to Danielle Russell, "New York restores Jadine's autonomy and independence" (2006: 69). Unlike Eloe, where she feels inauthentic and self-conscious, Jadine thrives in New York where she is not judged for her disregard for black tradition and where she is free to live her life according to her terms.

Jadine's return, or escape, to Paris can be interpreted in numerous ways, especially since, in Harris's words, "It is easy to be unsympathetic to Jadine. Here is a black woman who turns her back on family, denies her heritage, profanes her love relationship, and haughtily departs for another country" (1991: 128). With her controversial acts, Jadine awakens much criticism, especially among the traditional members of the black community. However, a major improvement can be perceived on her path toward individuation. On her flight to Paris, Jadine wisely concludes: "Perhaps that was the thing – the thing Ondine was saying. A grown woman did not need safety or its dreams. She *was* the safety she longed for" (Morrison 1981: 290). Jadine comes to the realization that she should not depend on others when it comes to feelings of happiness, safety, and accomplishment, but that she should provide them by and for herself; more importantly, she understands that her safety and happiness should not depend on a man.

According to Philip Page, "In choosing Paris, Jadine chooses herself, rejecting both Son and her aunt and uncle" (1995: 127). Interpreted in this way, Jadine opts for complete familial, communal, and romantic alienation, believing that self-reliance is of paramount importance. Consequently, she travels far away from her family and the community in which she was raised, isolating herself from their expectations and meddling. Still, Jadine's trip to Isle des Chevaliers has changed her significantly, and Morrison believes that Jadine has learned an important lesson in the process: "Now she knows something that she did not know before. She may know why she was running away. And maybe, the biggest thing that she can learn, even if she never gets back to Son, is that dreams of safety are childish" ("An Interview with Toni Morrison" 1993: 406). The same can be inferred about the dreams of unambiguous identity as identity is socially constructed and can be influenced by historical, social, and cultural factors; additionally, Jadine learns that pursuing certainty as safety is unattainable due to unpredictable events and unambiguous identities of people one interacts with. Jadine's thoughts and perspectives on life have changed a lot, showing maturity in her understanding of concepts of independence and freedom with regard to women. Most notably, Jadine comes to the realization that her self-definition should not be influenced or formed by male expectations. While John N. Duvall observes that Jadine "has not yet achieved a racialized adult identity" (2000: 105), he acknowledges that she has achieved substantial progress in the individuation process. Duvall further states: "namely, she recognizes that black female identity need not accept its construction by black men, particularly when that construction is complicitous with the assumptions of white patriarchy" (2000: 105). Duvall emphasizes Jadine's newly acquired knowledge that she does not need to depend on other people's opinions and definitions of what a black woman should be, whether these come from her family members or partners. In this way, Jadine makes great strides in her self-discovery.

5.3.2 Ondine

Ondine is a hardworking woman who, together with her husband Sydney, works as a servant in the Streets household. As Ondine has performed this grueling work for many years with only occasional complaints to her husband, she serves as a model of strength and resilience. When Jadine lost both of her parents, Ondine and Sydney raised her as if she were their own child, offering her love, support, and guidance. Ondine served as a maternal figure for Jadine, and she nurtured her to the best of her abilities. However, as Jadine was growing into an adult, Ondine realized some major mistakes she and her husband had made when it came to Jadine's upbringing. Due to their wish to aid and protect Jadine in the best way they could, they allowed Valerian to pay for her education so that Jadine would not lead the same life they did and would not become a servant in rich white people's houses. Nevertheless, Sydney and Ondine failed to teach Jadine important black history and traditional features. Consequently, Jadine does not develop an appreciation for black cultural heritage and is unwilling to honor one of the most significant aspects of black tradition – taking care of elderly family members. Ondine considers Jadine ungrateful and disrespectful due to her actions:

> Another one not from my womb, and I stand on my feet thirty years so she wouldn't have to. And did without so she wouldn't have to. And she couldn't think of nothing better to do than buy me some shoes I can't wear, a dress I shouldn't, and run off with the first pair of pants that steps in the door (Morrison 1981: 283).

Jadine's behavior and opinions speak volumes about her indifference toward her family members and her selfishness. Ondine feels sad over this as she and Sydney sacrificed their time, money, and health in order to ensure that Jadine is provided for financially and has bright prospects for the future.

Nevertheless, Ondine's thoughts reveal that it becomes clear to her that Jadine prioritizes materialism and herself over her family members: "She wondered if her niece would even have come to say goodbye had it not been that the sealskin coat was there" (Morrison 1981: 280). After the bitter argument erupted in the Streets household, Jadine left Isle des Chevaliers with Son without even informing her relatives about the real reason why she was leaving or ensuring that they still had jobs in the house. Furthermore, Jadine does not even pay attention to her aunt's tiredness and pain that she feels as the housework she does is getting too demanding for her age. Upon Jadine's arrival, Ondine attempts to have a conversation with her, hoping to explain that the fundamental aspect of female identity is to be a kind and thoughtful daughter: "Jadine, a girl has got 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" (Morrison 1981: 281). Perhaps listening to Ondine's advice could lead to the resolution of Jadine's identity crisis, as her identity crisis was triggered by the lack of respect from a fellow black woman, the incident that sparked off several insecurities and doubts when it comes to her life choices. Ondine's wise words directed at Jadine advise her that a black woman should treasure her history and heritage, which includes the traditional responsibility of caring for the elderly. However, while Jadine does politely listen to her aunt's speech, she disagrees with her definition of what a black woman should be and returns to Paris.

Ondine's relationship with Margaret reveals yet another of Ondine's outstanding qualities. Although Ondine was aware of Margaret's abuse of her son, she kept it a secret for a very long time. Ondine clarifies that she kept Margaret's secret for several reasons: "I don't know now what I thought, to tell the truth. But once I started keeping it – then it was like my secret too. Sometimes I thought if you all let me go there won't be anyone around to take the edge off it. I didn't want to leave him there, all by himself" (Morrison 1981: 241). Apart from the fear of losing her job, Ondine did not say anything about Margaret's physical abuse of Michael since she was worried about his well-being and wanted to be in the house should he need any assistance or should Margaret's actions worsen. Additionally, Ondine demonstrated a gesture of female solidarity and compassion by remaining silent about Margaret's deeds.

Another vital point worthy of discussion when it comes to Ondine is internalized racism that she displays in her attitude toward Son. Despite the fact that both Ondine and Son are black, she manifests her belief in the inter-racial hierarchy with her immediate assumption that Son is a criminal and a rapist because of his social status and skin color, as well as with her and Sydney's insistence that it was unfair that Valerian offered the guest room to the black man, while the two of them were sleeping in rooms designated for servants. Ondine even admits that her poor opinion of Son was formed on racial grounds: "But in talking to Sydney she knew what it was. The man was black. If he'd been a white bum in Mrs. Street's closet, well, she would have felt different" (Morrison 1981: 102). Ondine clearly states that her attitude toward an intruder would have been different if his skin color had been different, thus illustrating hypocrisy that is widely present in the L'Arbe de la Croix. All household members display racial hypocrisy and beliefs in racial hierarchies. Since Jadine has spent most of her life surrounded by these people, this could provide a plausible explanation to the relevant question of why Jadine experiences an identity crisis regarding her racial identity, as childhood years are crucial when it comes to one's identity development.

5.3.3 Thérèse

Thérèse is an elderly black woman who works for the Streets together with her nephew Gideon. Thérèse takes great pride in her origin and black history, and she regards all the inhabitants of L'Arbe de la Croix with contempt. K. Zauditu-Selassie adequately describes Thérèse: "Thérèse's identity comes from a deep reverence and connection to the land and not from aspiring to be like her employers, who, like others before, have historically exploited her people" (2009: 115). Thérèse has a negative opinion about white people who have accumulated considerable wealth owing to black labor; however, she simultaneously condemns black people for socializing with white people and forgetting their ancient properties. Philip Page suggests that Morrison juxtaposes Thérèse and Gideon on the one hand with the L'Arbe de la Croix household members on the other to draw attention to their vast differences: "Thérèse (and, through her, Gideon) embody what is absent in the other characters. Living genuine lives, in harmony with themselves, each other, their community, and nature, they possess the constructive fusion so lacking in the others" (1995: 118). Despite their low social status and financial struggles, Gideon and Thérèse seem very content with their lives, while other characters struggle with identity conflicts. Page implies that the reason for this could be that Gideon and Thérèse live peacefully in the place that they consider their home, that they embrace their history and tradition, and that they are liberated from any insecurities and doubts regarding their racial identities. Page further continues: "At home in the islands, they alone are free of the fear and tension that paralyze and confuse everyone else. The implication is that one must be "at home," in harmony with the cosmos, in order to work through the healing process of fusion and fragmentation" (1995: 118). Unlike Gideon and Thérèse, other characters in the novel appear displaced; living far away from home and not embracing their ancient properties cause issues on their journeys toward self-discovery, issues that Thérèse believes cannot be overcome unless one starts acknowledging and valuing one's cultural heritage.

Regarding Thérèse's opinion about Son, Thérèse believes that he is related to the blind wild horsemen who, according to myths, wander around Isle des Chevaliers. It is thought that these horsemen's ancestors became blind when they first saw the island, and Thérèse admires the horsemen as they remained true to their ancient properties. Therese E. Higgins makes a connection between Thérèse's identification of Son with the horsemen and Son and Jadine's relationship: "Also, Thérèse's identifying Son with the blind horsemen illustrates the keen insight that she has regarding Son's possession of his ancient properties and Jadine's lack of possession" (2010: 54). The reason why Thérèse is assured that Son is similar to the blind horsemen and why he should not pursue Jadine but stay on the island and join the horsemen is that he, just like the horsemen, possesses deep appreciation of his history and cultural heritage. Thérèse insists that Son should forget about Jadine as "She has forgotten her ancient properties" (Morrison 1981: 305), and therefore they are not suitable for each other. She encourages Son to join the horsemen as this would help set him free of Jadine's influence. The vague ending of the novel does not provide sufficient information for readers to conclude what happens next, as it is only clear that Son is presented with options.

Thérèse's character presents a complete opposite of Jadine. By juxtaposing these two characters, Morrison points to their extreme characteristics regarding history and tradition; while Jadine displays total neglect of her history and culture, not considering them relevant enough, Thérèse considers them to be of utmost importance when it comes to one's identity development, and she fiercely criticizes everyone who disregards their tradition. Therese E. Higgins compares Thérèse to other characters from Morrison's novels: "Pilate, Baby Suggs, and Thérèse all serve as the wise ancestor in Morrison's three novels. All are guides and succeed in aiding, guiding, and even saving their loved ones during the course of their lives" (2010: 57). Interpreted in this way, Thérèse can be seen as a spiritual leader whose aim is to

dissuade Son from making wrong choices and following Jadine since she is wise enough to understand that their cultural differences are too vast to overcome.

5.3.4 Margaret Street

Margaret Street is a white woman, the first one to be depicted in great detail in this thesis and the first one whose perspective is presented in Morrison's novels analyzed thus far. By illuminating Margaret's identity crisis, Morrison shows the universality of the topics she tackles in her novels unrelated to race.

Throughout her whole life, Margaret has felt very lonely and isolated. While growing up, her parents were confused by her exceptional beauty and the fact that she did not resemble them. Therefore, they did not pay much attention to Margaret, and she grew up feeling alienated from her closest family members. This could be interpreted as one of the reasons why Margaret fails as a mother; she does not have good role models to look up to. Furthermore, due to her lonely childhood, Margaret felt fortunate when she was offered an opportunity to get married at a very young age: "So when she got married eight months out of high school, she did not have to leave home, she was already gone; she did not have to leave them; they had already left her" (Morrison 1981: 57). However, despite her hopes, the feelings of loneliness and isolation persisted in her new home and around her new family: "It was always like that: she was gone and other people were where they belonged" (Morrison 1981: 57). Margaret's life in seclusion continued; in the same way that she felt that she did not belong in her home with parents, now she felt that she did not belong in the Caribbean. Margaret's solitude deepened when Valerian prohibited her from socializing with Ondine, the only friend she had had. Margaret's profound unhappiness with her marital and maternal roles manifested in her physical abuse of Michael, her son. In the words of Andrea O'Reilly: "Without companionship or work other than that of motherhood, Margaret abuses her son to fill up the emptiness and give some meaning to her life. The abuse makes her somehow more real" (2004: 146). Margaret was deprived of any responsibility; she did not need to work and provide financially for the family, she was not in charge of cooking and doing chores, and did not seem to have had any hobbies or social interactions with friends. Therefore, motherhood was Margaret's only obligation, and it appears that this patriarchal role did not bring her fulfillment and happiness. Valerian acknowledges that Margaret was too young and unprepared to be a mother: "But she wasn't ready for him. She just wasn't ready. Now, now she's ready. When it's over. Now she wants to bake him cookies. See him off to school. Tie his shoelaces. Take care of him. Now. Absurd" (Morrison 1981: 76). When Michael was a baby, he naturally sought attention from his mother, but Margaret, young and inexperienced, saw nurturing of her child as a burden: "She could not describe her loathing of its prodigious appetite for security – the criminal arrogance of an infant's conviction that while he slept, someone is there; that when he wakes, someone is there; that when he is hungry, food will somehow magically be provided" (Morrison 1981: 236). Margaret's feelings toward her son turned into loathing, a strong feeling of hatred for his needs, and a craving for her presence. However, now that enough time has passed and Margaret has matured, she wishes to compensate for the time she lost with Michael; she hopes to cook Christmas dinner for him, come up with the best Christmas present, and move closer to him. Despite Margaret's best intentions, she fails to realize that Michael is an adult who now does not need his mother's constant attention and care.

On the topic of Margaret's motherhood skills, Andrea O'Reilly does not place all the blame solely on Margaret: "Margaret is, I suggest, as much a victim of the institution of motherhood as is her son Michael" (2004: 144). Given Margaret's young age, isolated

childhood, tedious marital life, and the overall patriarchal expectations when it comes to women's roles in child-rearing, it can be concluded that social conventions victimize Margaret.

Regarding Margaret's reasons for abusing her child, Ondine presents an interesting perspective: "She didn't stick pins in her baby. She stuck em in his baby. Her baby she loved" (Morrison 1981: 279). Margaret transferred the annoyance and anger she felt toward Valerian to her son. Additionally, as Valerian was the one who controlled their lives and their household and made all the decisions for both of them without even asking Margaret for her opinion, this was one area of their life together that Margaret was in control of. She was evidently very unhappy in her married life, and as she felt too weak to raise her concerns and the causes of her unhappiness to Valerian, she took them out on Michael since she subconsciously knew that, by hurting his son, she would hurt Valerian too. Therefore, it can be concluded that the reasons for Margaret's abuse of her son and the consequent infliction of trauma on the whole family are complex and interconnected.

It can be argued that Margaret's troubled psyche reveals that she suffers from emotional distress. Margaret often feels worried and anxious; she expresses unhappiness about her married life, where she lives, and her relationship with her son. Additionally, Margaret displays some strange modes of behavior; she occasionally cannot remember what to do with particular objects; for example, she gets confused and is unsure which part of fruit she should eat, and she sometimes forgets words for objects.

Although Margaret never planned on sharing her secret with anyone, Ondine, as the only witness to Margaret's behavior, decides she cannot be quiet anymore and tells the truth to all the residents of L'Arbe de la Croix. Judith Herman mentions an important fact that "Witnesses as well as victims are subject to the dialectic of trauma" (1992: 2), and Margaret seemed unaware and perhaps even unconcerned that the traumatic experience she inflicted on her child and her family also harmed Ondine who knew about it but felt reluctant to speak of it. However, once the cause of her anxiety, unhappiness, and distress is revealed to her husband, Margaret transforms completely. As observed by Herman, "Sharing the traumatic experience with others is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world" (1992: 70). Once Margaret can talk freely about what she has done, and she can explain herself to Valerian, she feels much happier and freer, and it seems that this helped her overcome her identity crisis.

When analyzing Margaret's personality and character traits, it should be emphasized that she is a privileged, wealthy white woman who enjoys all the luxuries the white world offers. Despite her and her husband's kindness toward Jadine and their treatment of her as if she were a family member, Margaret occasionally displays some concealed instances of racism. When Margaret discovered an intruder in her closet, her only words were "Black" (Morrison 1981: 79). Like all other household members except Valerian, Margaret assumed that Son was dangerous because of his skin color. In this way, Margaret shows racist tendencies that are part of her personality despite her affection for Jadine and her attempted friendship with Ondine.

When comparing Margaret to Ondine and Jadine, it is noteworthy to emphasize that although they all belong to the same gender category, the nature of their identity crises is entirely different. As Margaret occupies a higher racial and social hierarchy position, she has never struggled financially like Ondine, and she has never experienced a cultural identity crisis like Jadine, who feels torn between the white and black tradition. However, despite their differences in terms of race and social class, Margaret proves to have a lot in common with Ondine when their parenting styles are taken into consideration. Whether they would wish to admit it or not, it seems that both of them failed as mothers since Michael certainly carries psychological scars from his childhood and obviously still feels at least a bit of resentment for his mother as he never wishes to visit her, not even for Christmas. On the other hand, Jadine develops a complete disregard for both her family members and cultural heritage. Additionally,

Margaret's life proves that, despite her racial, social, and class superiority, her privileges cannot prevent her from experiencing struggles and suffering from identity crises.

5.4 Themes that form problematic narratives surrounding female identity

5.4.1 Racial discrimination, white gaze, and the male gaze

Tar Baby illustrates with numerous examples that racial discrimination and the adoption of the white gaze and/or male gaze have a devastating impact on self-construction. It is important to emphasize that both black and white people employ the "white gaze" in their judgments of other people's characters and that both black and white people blatantly discriminate against others on racial grounds. One of the most prominent examples in the novel is the initial encounter of the L'Arbe de la Croix residents with Son; all the residents, regardless of the color of their skin, consider Son to be dangerous due to his race and social status. Herbert William Rice describes how Son is perceived: "To all of these black and white characters, Son represents the unknown and the uncivilized, and the language they use to describe him shows that they associate these characteristics with his blackness" (1996: 85). Even Ondine who is black herself, admits that her reaction would have been different if the man in the closet had been white (Morrison 1981: 102). Characters formed their negative opinion about Son based on race, without taking into consideration his characteristics or explanations of his actions. Rice suggests that characters negatively observe Son in an attempt to suppress the negative aspects of their personalities: "In many respects, the other main characters in the novel have the same reaction to Son that Jadine initially does: they see in him a savagery that they fail to acknowledge in themselves" (1996: 86). The sight of a proud attractive black man awakens racial insecurities in Jadine, bringing to the fore the feeling of inauthenticity regarding her racial identity. The fact that the black intruder gets more privileges from Valerian, their employer, than they have ever got intensifies Sydney and Ondine's belief in the existence of inter- and intra-racial hierarchies. The picture of her husband paying more attention to Son's needs than her own deepens Margaret's intolerance of Valerian's behavior. However, despite their initial disapproval of Son, the characters change their attitudes toward Son and start accepting him. This shows that they discriminated against Son due to racial stereotypes and prejudices that have been built into their mindsets and not due to objective conclusions that they reached regarding Son's personality. Interestingly enough, Son also makes stereotypical assumptions about Jadine; because of the light shade of her black skin and privileged lifestyle, Son attributes negative characteristics that he associates with white people to Jadine.

Another instance of racial discrimination is evident in the L'Arbe de la Croix residents' treatment of Gideon and Thérèse. Valerian, Margaret, Sydney, Ondine, and Jadine all deprive Gideon and Thérèse of their individuality and essential aspect of identity by not calling them by their names and simply addressing them "Yardman" and "Mary." Gideon even mentions that Thérèse was fired multiple times but that he merely brings her back to work after a few days, and the household members do not even notice that she is the same person as before. This example shows how white people perceive black servants and how black people who consider themselves in a higher position on the social hierarchy regard those they consider inferior. Son feels extremely upset over this, as he believes Gideon and Thérèse to be superior to all other L'Arbe de la Croix residents because, unlike them, they respect and honor black history and tradition. Son criticizes Jadine for not knowing Gideon and Thérèse's real names, but, just like all other household members, Jadine does not seem to be too bothered by his criticism.

Taking Jadine's origin, upbringing, physical appearance, and character traits into consideration, it appears very challenging to categorize her as belonging to a particular race.

Ed Guerrero believes that due to these complex circumstances: "Jadine is figured as more the object of "the look," in accordance with white feminist and cultural criticism's definitions, than any of Morrison's other characters" (1997: 37). Jadine is subjected to a higher degree of scrutiny in comparison to other characters as the people she is surrounded by perceive her by adopting either the white gaze, male gaze, and even a very distinctive black perspective. When the woman in the yellow dress spits at Jadine, this act reflects her gaze that is infused with an appreciation of the black cultural tradition that Jadine rejects. The same view is adopted by the Eloe community, whose members believe that Jadine possesses white characteristics and privileges. Moreover, Son's adoption of the male gaze in his perception of Jadine deepens her identity crisis as she feels offended by his belief that she achieved career success due to her involvement with white men. "The gaze of the Other" (Schreiber 2001: 80) causes cultural shame and feelings of inauthenticity and inadequacy regarding Jadine's cultural heritage, which significantly impedes her individuation process.

Furthermore, even though "the gaze of the other" has a considerable influence on Jadine, it is also noteworthy to emphasize that Jadine herself adopts the white gaze, especially when she travels to Eloe with Son and looks down on Eloe inhabitants. Since Jadine has no home and no community that she belongs to, she does not understand the bond of Eloe community members and what this bond means to Son. Jadine's view of Eloe points to her racial anxiety and racial self-loathing, as well as her belief in the existence of racial hierarchies. Because of her education, successful career, and access to financial means, Jadine considers herself to be on a higher social level than residents of Eloe. She displays a white gaze in her perception of the Eloe community; her gaze is very similar to Valerian's, who also believes in racial and social hierarchies.

On the topic of Jadine's racial identity, it is important to emphasize that Jadine rejects racial categorization; she refuses to categorize herself into exclusively belonging to a black or white race as she disapproves of all the communal expectations that are tied to it. Jadine does not wish to be forced to appreciate the black history and culture simply because she is black, and Herbert William Rice believes that these thoughts could reveal Morrison's message regarding racial issues: "Morrison's novel shows us that the self is neither black nor white; it is both. Furthermore, its secrets are deeper than the ocean, and they reside in each of us, black and white, perpetually dividing us and bringing us together" (1996: 97). In the same way that morality is considered to be ambiguous and it is challenging to categorize people into being "good" or "bad," perhaps Morrison wishes to suggest the progressive idea that contemporary black females reject racial categorization as these often bring about racial conflicts and cause identity crises.

When it comes to the discussion of racial hierarchies, Morrison includes a positive aspect: she shows that the hierarchy of beauty standards based on racism does not seem to be relevant anymore. Malin Walther Pereira makes an insightful observation about this: "While in the earlier novels the idea of beauty seems to be dominated by white standards, in *Tar Baby* Morrison represents and elaborates on alternatives" (2010: 230). By portraying many beautiful women, such as the white Margaret, the black woman in the yellow dress, and the black but fair-skinned Jadine, Morrison depicts the idea that beauty standards have changed and that beauty is a subjective notion that is not tied to race, and illustrates that both black and white people have progressed significantly in their opinions on what is beautiful. Debbie Clare Olson addresses the importance of Morrison's inclusion of beautiful black women who are considered to be attractive by members of all races: "Black feminist writers dissipate and fracture the white gaze that looks upon the black female as *not* white, and therefore *not* beautiful, and instead present ideal images of beautiful, desirable black women" (2006: 51). By presenting beautiful Jadine who works as a fashion model, Morrison shows that significant improvement has been

made as the fashion industry often dictates beauty standards. In addition to this, Pereira brings to the fore another sign of societal progress:

> Second, characters discuss differing aesthetic values throughout the novel, with Jadine favoring Picasso and hating the swamp, with Valerian preferring his hot-house blooms to the tropical vegetation outdoors, and with the emperor butterflies deploring the sealskin coat Jadine adores (2010: 230).

Morrison illustrates that characters can express their opinions freely without fear of communal ostracism. Society has advanced to the point that community members can criticize elements of their own culture and cherish aspects of tradition that they do not belong to. Therefore, Jadine freely discusses elements of black and white culture with Valerian, who also shows admiration for aspects of black culture rather than his own, as he chooses the Caribbean as the place where he wishes to spend the rest of his life.

By presenting both positive and negative examples of tackling racial issues that are still very widely present in American society, it seems that Morrison wishes to suggest that racial tensions, while subdued, still impact one's identity development, especially when confused young women such as Jadine are taken into consideration. Morrison also warns that accepting one's racial identity is of paramount importance, as Jadine illustrates, since its rejection might cause interference with the individuation process.

5.4.2 Loss of ancient properties

By selecting Isle des Chevaliers as the novel's main setting, Morison infuses this place with symbolic meaning. Isle des Chevaliers is a very peculiar place, as it is home to both black and white people, ancient myths and modern lifestyles, unresolved historical issues, and ongoing dependence of two races on each other. Isle des Chevaliers symbolizes the never-ending struggle between treasuring and disregarding one's ancient properties, which is one of the major themes in the novel, as acknowledging and honoring one's history and cultural heritage is a significant aspect of a journey toward self-discovery.

On the one hand, Morrison depicts Jadine, a black woman estranged from her cultural background and history. Jadine rejects her tradition in numerous ways, from simple instances, such as her dislike of hoop earrings and black artworks, to significant ones, such as her refusal to help and care for elderly family members. However, the sight of the authentic, proud black woman in a supermarket awakens feelings of inadequacy and inauthenticity in Jadine. Noticing Jadine's gaze, the woman in the yellow dress spits. Trudier Harris explains that the woman in the yellow dress uses this gesture to send a message to Jadine that she does not appreciate her stare and that she condemns her blatant disregard for ancient properties: "The woman senses this in Jadine – the curiosity instead of the kinship – and responds accordingly" (1991: 132). It is noteworthy to make a connection between the woman in the yellow dress from *Tar Baby* and Rochelle from *Sula*. Both of these women trigger the feeling of cultural shame; the sight of her mother Rochelle reawakens Nel's mother's sense of shame of her background and upbringing, while Jadine starts feeling ashamed of her lack of ancient properties when she spots the woman in the yellow dress.

Another possible interpretation could be that the sight of the woman in the yellow dress evokes nostalgia in Jadine. It can be argued that the reason why Jadine is unaware and unappreciative of traditional black values is that she was orphaned as a young girl, she lost both of her parents in the years that are crucial for one's identity construction and when

knowledge of history, customs, and culture are passed down from parents to children. Exploring the implications of the feeling of nostalgia, Denis Walder states: "Exploring nostalgia can and should open up a negotiation between the present and the past, leading to a fuller understanding of the past and how it has shaped the present, for good and bad, and how it has shaped the self in connection with others" (2011: 9). Perhaps the sight of a woman in yellow dress makes Jadine nostalgic for, not only the ancient properties but also the absence of her parents, as she starts feeling the consequences of their absence on her journey toward self-discovery.

However, as much as Jadine tries to include elements of black culture into her life, such as traveling to Isle des Chevaliers to reconnect with her family, starting a relationship with Son, and traveling to the all-black town Eloe with him, Jadine realizes that she is unable to do so. According to Elliott Burler-Evans, the trip to Eloe marks Jadine's total disregard for ancient properties: "This rejection of Eloe represents Jadine's rejection of everything implied by it: the myth of an authentic Black existential modality, reified Black womanhood produced by that myth, and Son as the romanticized Black male" (1989: 161). Jadine feels highly uncomfortable in Eloe; despite her belonging to the same race as the residents of Eloe, Jadine realizes that their level of education, job prospects, lifestyles, value systems, and perspectives on cultural matters are entirely different. She understands she has more in common with white people such as Valerian and Margaret than black people living in Eloe. Jadine's remark that "Eloe was rotten and more boring than ever. A burnt-out place. There was no life there. Maybe a past but definitely no future and finally there was no interest" (Morrison 1981: 259) shows that, despite her efforts and attempts, Jadine is unable to develop an appreciation of black history and tradition.

On the other hand, Morrison portrays people who display ancient properties as intrinsic parts of their personalities, such as Son, the woman in the yellow dress, and Thérèse. Despite her brief appearance in the novel, the woman in the yellow dress has significant symbolic importance as she triggers Jadine's identity crisis when it comes to her racial identity and rejection of black history and tradition. Andrea O'Reilly believes the reason for this is because the woman in the yellow dress possesses everything that Jadine lacks: "In contrast, the woman in yellow whom Jadine sees in the market comes to signify and embody those ancient properties" (2004: 65). The pride that the woman in yellow dress takes in her black features and ancestry makes Jadine feel insecure and question the life choices she had made thus far.

Son believes that cherishing tradition and ancestry is of paramount importance, which is the reason why he socializes with Gideon and Thérèse, who share the same values, and why he criticizes Jadine due to her willful alienation from black history and culture. Probably the main reason why Son feels this way about his black heritage is that he was born and raised in an all-black town, Eloe. However, while Eloe celebrates black culture and tradition, it should not be neglected that this is an impoverished town that offers limited opportunities for black people, which is one of the main reasons why Jadine does not tolerate staying there for a more extended period. Additionally, Carmen Gillespie suggests that Son is drawn to his hometown because, for Son, Eloe means that he is a member of the community: "The knowledge and proclamation that he is from Eloe is fundamental to Son's sense of self. Eloe is home, a community that knows and values him. Jadine has no such community and therefore feels homeless" (2008: 218). As Jadine has never been a part of any community, she cannot comprehend the bond that community members have, which includes sharing the same history, tradition, and values. Son and Jadine's incompatibility is reflected in the juxtaposition of the absence of community in Jadine's life and the importance of community in Son's life.

Despite him being a black man himself who takes great pride in honoring the ancient properties, Gideon expresses sympathy for Jadine and attempts to warn Son: "Look out. It's hard for them not to be white people. Hard, I'm telling you. Most never make it. Some try, but

most don't make it" (Morrison 1981: 155). Gideon has been working for Valerian for a long time and hence is well aware of the circumstances in which Jadine was brought up. Therefore, he shows an understanding of Jadine's struggles as he can assume that it is easier for her to give in to the privileged white lifestyle than make an effort to learn about and cherish black history and tradition. Gideon also explains, "Yallas don't come to being black natural-like. They have to choose it and most don't choose it" (Morrison 1981: 155). Describing Jadine as "yalla", the term used to denote light-skinned people, Gideon wishes to emphasize that this is one of the crucial differences between Son and Jadine; while it is natural for him to accept black history and ancestry, that is not the case for Jadine. As the white community readily accepts light-skinned, educated, beautiful, and privileged people like Jadine, it is her decision which community she prefers and which values she supports.

When it comes to the challenges that Jadine and Son face in their relationship, Carmen Gillespie explains that the principal causes of their conflicts are their striking differences: "Jadine represents the colonized person who longs for authenticity and is plagued with insecurity and self-doubt about her character and worth. Son represents another extreme. He is a sort of contemporary Caliban – a natural man who is enmeshed in folk culture and wisdom" (2008: 8). Son and Jadine depict two extreme personalities, and the novel eventually shows that, despite their best efforts to try to overcome their differences, they start impeding their journeys toward self-discoveries and gradually end their romantic relationship. Elliott Butler-Evans emphasizes that cultural difference is the deciding factor that tears the relationship apart: "The separation between her and Son at the conclusion of the novel is the direct product of the irreconcilability of their respective value systems" (1989: 161). Son and Jadine's different levels of understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage ultimately bring them to separate paths, Son returns to nature, and Jadine returns to Paris.

Furthermore, both Son and Jadine wanted to rescue each other when none of them felt they required rescue. Jadine admits that: "She thought she was rescuing him from the night women who wanted him for themselves" (Morrison 1981: 269), while Son "thought he was rescuing her from Valerian, meaning *them*, the aliens, the people who in a mere three hundred years had killed a world millions of years old" (Morrison 1981: 269). Both Son and Jadine wanted to save each other from what they thought was wrong in the life of another, not taking into consideration the personal opinion and feelings of their partners. They were trying to change each other and mold them into what each of them considered to be the perfect partner. As Carolyn Cooper insightfully observes: "Jadine refigures Son's past, forcing him to abandon something essential in himself" (1991: 80). Jadine wishes that Son would let go of Eloe and, with it, his respect for the black community and culture. As unfair as this sounds, Son also wishes that Jadine would let go of the Streets and all her ties with white tradition. Both of them are asking each other to relinquish essential aspects of their personalities, which further proves their incompatibility.

Aoi Mori offers gloomy prospects for reconciliation: "Neither Jadine nor Son can contribute to the future because one lacks a knowledge of the past, and the other a realistic sense of the future" (1999: 132). As has already been mentioned, Jadine and Son represent extreme beliefs when it comes to black ancestry, as Jadine completely rejects black history and cultural heritage, while Son appreciates them to the extent that he rejects and considers inferior everything and everyone that does not belong to a black tradition. However, it seems that Morrison wishes to suggest that neither of them is right and that perhaps the balance between the two could account for a happy and content individual.

The ending of both the novel and Son and Jadine's relationship suggests that the two of them are returning to their beliefs and the places where they belong: Jadine goes back to her career and university in Paris, and Son presumably goes back to nature, to join the blind horsemen of Isle des Chevaliers. As noted by Stelamaris Coser, "He goes away to the deep

center of the Earth, where the beginning is and the truth of nature lies, a symbolic retreat into the African cultural past that promises renewal and life" (1994: 116). Thérèse believes that the journey into the cultural center of Isle des Chevaliers and establishing a connection with the descendants of the island's first inhabitants would aid Son in the process of his self-discovery and forgetting about the woman who has lost her ancient properties and, thus, in Thérèse's eyes, is not suitable to be his partner. Carolyn Cooper observes the similarity between the novel's beginning and end, which she believes carries symbolic significance: "Morrison begins and ends the novel with Son in flight, a seemingly circular movement of entrapment. But the second flight so cunningly engineered by Thérèse is a heroic, headlong lickety-split climb to the waiting horsemen and freedom from the spell of the Tar Baby" (1991: 80). At the beginning of the novel, Son is running away from the actual danger, in its literal meaning, as he committed a crime of murdering his wife. On the contrary, at the novel's end, Thérèse helps Son avoid spiritual danger, as she wishes to protect him from a dysfunctional relationship with a girl who does not share the same values and appreciation of cultural heritage as he does.

In conclusion, in the juxtaposition of Son with Jadine, Paris and New York with Eloe and Isle des Chevaliers, Gideon, and Thérèse with L'Arbe de la Croix residents, Morrison wishes to draw attention to the importance of ancient properties in one's identity construction. According to Aoi Mori: "Morrison's intention to present the African-American myth lies in her interest in understanding the past as an indispensable reservoir of knowledge and culture necessary for the survival of African Americans" (1999: 140). While Morrison does illustrate in Jadine's case that possession of ancient properties is very significant in order to avoid identity crisis and confusion over one's cultural and racial identity, she also emphasizes that total immersion in one's history and tradition has its downsides as it can cause alienation from other communities and therefore lack of educational and job prospects and social interactions.

5.4.3 Family and motherhood

The themes of family and motherhood occupy a central position in Morrison's fiction as their impact on female characters' identity construction proves to be immense. *Tar Baby* depicts traumatized families and challenges the notion of a traditional nuclear family. All the families portrayed in the novel – the Streets family, Jadine's family, and Son's family – are dysfunctional. Morrison demonstrates poor parenting skills in both Margaret and Valerian on the one hand and Sydney and Ondine on another, thus showing that successful parenting is unrelated to race and class.

Valerian and Margaret Street create an illusion of a happy marriage and loving family where Valerian seems to be a dominant patriarchal figure in control of his household, and Margaret a beautiful housewife and caring mother who works hard to prepare Christmas dinner and an ideal Christmas gift for her son. According to J. Brooks Bouson, this image of the deceptively happy family is ironically used to eliminate prejudices about black families: "Countering the white myth that the black family is a tangle of pathology, *Tar Baby* depicts the culturally idealized white family as pathological as it describes Margaret as a secret abuser" (2000: 111). The revelation of Margaret's physical and, consequently, psychological abuse of her son Michael breaks the illusion of a perfect white family. Ondine, who was the only witness to Margaret's crime and who kept her secret for decades, eventually decides to tell the truth: "You cut him up. You cut your baby up. Made him bleed for you. For fun you did it. Made him scream, you, you freak. You crazy white freak" (Morrison 1981: 208). The reasons why Margaret treated Michael the way she did are unclear and could be attributed to several different reasons. Margaret herself had a very complicated relationship with her parents, who never served as good role models for her; she was neglected as a child, lacking love and care.

Apart from that, Margaret got married and started a family when she was very young; she was unprepared to be a wife and a mother at such a young age. Furthermore, Carolyn Cooper implies that Margaret's actions were directed at Valerian and his behavior toward her in marriage: "She revolts against the greedy intimacies of mothering; the child's demanding need for constant security mirrors Margaret's own need for protection. Her husband's distant innocence of his family's grief is an act of complicity which Margaret finally forces him to acknowledge" (1991: 80). The conclusion can be drawn that Margaret found the nurturing of a child challenging and demanding, while her husband was often absent from home and too busy to notice the abuse of his son and the psychological condition of his distressed wife.

Margaret's actions imposed severe trauma on all the members of the Streets family. Margaret lived a sad, isolated life, aware of her wrong deeds and Michael's distance from her until her secret was revealed and she finally verbalized the traumatic experiences she had gone through. On the other hand, Valerian becomes traumatized when he discovers that he is a failed patriarchal figure who has never been in control of his household and who is guilty of the "crime of innocence" (Morrison 1981: 242) as he refused to be more involved in family affairs and consequently was not aware of the events in the house. When it comes to the impact of trauma on Michael, Ondine shares the information that he felt terrified and that it is understandable why he does not wish to visit Isle des Chevaliers often: "After a while – after a while he didn't even cry. And she wants him home…for Christmas and apple pie. A little boy who she hurt so much he can't even cry" (Morrison 1981: 209). Contrary to Ondine's opinion, Margaret believes that enough time has passed and that Michael has completely healed from childhood traumas that have not influenced his adult life. Still, since Michael does not appear in the novel, it is difficult to judge whether he indeed recovered from the trauma.

Another traumatized family member that Morrison describes is Jadine, who lost both of her parents as a young girl. Her aunt and uncle, Sydney and Ondine, accepted the very responsible and demanding job of raising Jadine as their own child and provided her with love, care, and support. Apart from them, Valerian and Margaret also had an important role in Jadine's upbringing as they provided financial means for her education and proved to be an influential presence in Jadine's life. Jadine's path toward individuation has therefore been affected by two sets of parents, one white, wealthy, and privileged, and the other one black, poor, and occupying the lower position on the social hierarchy.

According to Florian Coulmas: "Our personal identity, too, is to a considerable degree moulded by the people we interact with, who tell us what we are or should be, whom we admire or despise" (2019: 10). Although Jadine was exposed to both white and black tradition while she was growing up, an adult Jadine lives in Paris, works as a fashion model and studies art history at a prestigious university, completely distanced from black history and culture. Therefore, it is not unusual that she also feels emotionally distant from her aunt and uncle who raised her, buys highly inappropriate gifts for them, and does not feel obliged to provide for them and take care of them in their old age. On the other hand, Sydney and Ondine expect Jadine to honor black tradition, and they occasionally tell her so: "Don't you ever leave us, baby. You all we got" (Morrison 1981: 40). However, while Jadine is aware of their expectations, she does not plan to fulfill them. She informs her aunt and uncle that she needs to leave for New York, where she plans to earn money so that she can provide for them and they can all live together, but these words are an attempt to deceive them as she is traveling to New York to be with Son and the money she earned there she spent on their life together. When Jadine returns from New York, both Sydney and Ondine are aware of the truth, and while Ondine does try to have a conversation with Jadine to explain the importance of culture and history, the reality is that she cannot really criticize Jadine as she played a crucial role in her upbringing and she partially contributed to the creation of Jadine's personality. When Jadine's total disregard for ancient properties becomes clear to Sydney and Ondine, they wonder: ""You

think she'll bury us, Ondine?" "I think we're going to have to bury ourselves, Sydney"" (Morrison 1981: 284). Sydney and Ondine come to the painful realization that they cannot count on Jadine in the future.

Apart from the influence of the environment she grew up in, Jadine's identity development is marked mainly by the absence of her parents, primarily her mother. Adrienne Rich emphasizes, "The loss of the daughter to the mother, the mother to the daughter, is the essential female tragedy" (1986: 237). By being deprived of her mother, Jadine is also deprived of the elements of black history and cultural heritage that her mother could have passed down to her. Because of the absence of both her mother and ancient properties, Jadine struggles with achieving maturity and stability on her journey toward self-disovery.

All things considered, it seems that Morrison, in Pin-chis Feng's words, wishes to suggest the following: "The daughter needs to find a middle ground, which allows her to be both rooted in the community and enjoy individual freedom, before she can have any developmental breakthrough" (1998: 89). While Morrison does encourage young black women such as Jadine to be educated, successful, and independent, she also insists that these achievements should not exclude their knowledge about and appreciation of ancient properties, as cherishing traditional values and culture are extremely important for one's identity development.

5.4.4 Women and men

Men in the novel play a vital role in female characters' identity development, especially negatively, as they often impede their progress in that respect. Discussing how Morrison portrays male characters in her fiction, David E. Magill states:

> Morrison always recognizes that masculinity is not a biological given but a social invention, as is race. Morrison represents a plurality of masculinities in her fictions, and she also notes the ways that gender, class, and race are discursive categories that structure that practice of manhood (2003: 202).

Morrison describes men who take great pride in belonging to these socially invented categories, believing that belonging to a particular race, class, or gender category gives them superiority over other community members.

One of the examples of a man who believes that he is at the top of racial, gender, and class hierarchy is Valerian Street. Valerian disregards the fact that black labor enabled his wealth and privileges. Regarding Valerian's ignorance, Doreatha Drummond Mbalia posits: "Valerian Street, as well as all who share his aspirations, is a symbol of American capitalism and imperialism. Indeed, he is a typical capitalist who has made his fortune by exploiting the labor of the African masses and by stealing their land" (1991: 71). Ironically, Valerian does not seem to recall this fact when he punishes Gideon and Thérèse for stealing apples. However, Valerian does not only seem ignorant when it comes to his business and financial capabilities but also regarding his patriarchal role as the head of his household. Valerian appeared unaware that his wife's unhappiness turned her into an abuser and that his son suffered significant consequences as Margaret took out all her negative feelings on Michael. Although Valerian remembered "the picture of the beautiful boy in the laundry under the sink, singing because he could not speak or cry – because he had no vocabulary for what was happening to him" (Morrison 1981: 234), he had never made an effort to discover why his son behaved the way that he did. Therefore, it can be concluded that Valerian and Margaret share the guilt, as

Valerian "had chosen not to know the real message that his son had mailed to him from underneath the sink. And all he could say was that he did not know. He was guilty, therefore, of innocence. Was there anything so loathsome as a willfully innocent man? Hardly" (Morrison 1981: 243). After the revelation of Margaret's secret, Valerian started reminiscing about all the strange things he observed while Michael was growing up, and he never attempted to discover what caused his behavior. Additionally, Valerian's condescending treatment of Margaret and his disregard for her needs, and her sadness contributed to and perhaps even caused Margaret's abusive behavior. The conclusion can be drawn that Valerian fails as a patriarchal figure in the novel.

Nevertheless, despite the strained relationship with his son, Valerian also plays a parental role for Jadine, as he provides for her financially and aids and supports her in her endeavors, feeling very proud of her accomplishments. Perhaps the reason why Valerian displays such generosity and care for Jadine is that he is trying to overcompensate for the lack of guidance and nurture for his own son. According to Sandra Pouchet Paquet: "To Valerian, she is a measure of what he could not accomplish with his own son" (1997: 194). Even though Valerian has not had a dominant influence on Michael's choices and viewpoints, he has significantly impacted Jadine, whose identification with the white world and appreciation of white culture largely stem from Valerian's impact.

With the arrival of Son in L'Arbe de la Croix, Morrison juxtaposes Son with Valerian, showing both their vast differences and occasional similarities. Son Green brings disruption in what appears to be an orderly white household. However, despite the obvious differences in terms of race and class, Valerian and Son seem to have something in common – they both act according to patriarchal expectations and gender roles; Valerian does not allow his decisions to be questioned in the household, and Son physically hurts his female partners when his authority is threatened. John N. Duvall makes an analogy between the two men: "What Son wants to do to the fashion model Jadine is what Valerian already has done to Margaret, the former Maine beauty queen; namely, construct a female subjectivity that effaces itself the better to serve male identity" (2000: 111). When Valerian married Margaret, he intentionally limited her potential and wished by assigning her a role of a housewife and mother, expecting her to perform these roles dutifully. On the other hand, even though Son seems to be impressed by Jadine's achievements, he wishes to isolate her from the white world that makes her achievements possible. Perhaps the reason why Valerian accepts Son into his household and provides him with documents and clothes is that he feels guilty over not having spent enough time with his son, so when he sees a troubling young man in need, he decides to help him.

Moreover, Morrison juxtaposes Son with Jadine, as Son, in Linda Wagner-Martin's words: "becomes a prototype for the black man who has not followed white paths to prosperity or acceptability" (2015: 53). Son refuses to be infiltrated into the white world and thus illustrates the limited possibilities for black people who wish to be isolated from the white culture. Son's life is defined by poverty, crime, and violence without any job prospects or educational opportunities.

Additionally, Son reveals a hypocritical side to his personality when he tells Jadine that he does not believe women are inferior to men as women in Eloe have always done hard work despite their gender. Still, Aoi Mori suggests that "Son's eventual attempt to dominate Jadine reveals his patriarchal attitudes and nonreciprocal male desires" (1999: 145). Son illustrates his belief in patriarchal values with his insistence that Jadine lets go of Valerian's financial support, although the money she receives from Valerian helps her enjoy the comfortable lifestyle she is used to. Since Son is very well aware of all the differences between him and Jadine, he often criticizes her for her bond with Valerian, her lack of respect for her relatives, and not knowing Gideon and Thérèse's real names. Son considers Jadine's education useless: "What the hell kind of education is it that didn't teach you about Gideon and the Old Man and me. Nothing

about me!" (Morrison 1981: 265). Son condemns Jadine's education for not teaching her about the importance of black history and culture.

Despite their differences, Son and Jadine worked hard to try to make their relationship work; Son attempted to go to school to please Jadine. However, he could have taken more interest in it as she was the one filing applications and searching for suitable school programs for him. As a result, Jadine looked tired and did not take good care of herself as she had done before, which is the reason why it became difficult for her to get modeling jobs. Aoi Mori defines the main problem overshadowing all other issues Son and Jadine have had in their relationship: "Although he introduces his knowledge of the past to Jadine, who has lost that link, his interests remain only with the past without a perspective for the future, which foreshadows his failure" (1999: 45). Son's obsession over the importance of black history and ancestry and his refusal to accept and incorporate into the white world in search of a better life keep him closely connected to the past and unable to make any progress. Morrison believes that the problems of Son's future are presented at the end of the novel as "he is given a choice, to join the twentieth century or not. If he decides to join the twentieth century, he would be following Jadine. If he decides not to join the twentieth century and would join these men, he would lock himself up forever from the future" ("Toni Morrison" 1994: 111). Although the novel has an ambiguous ending and readers do not find out about the outcome of Son's choice, Morrison does not consider staying on an island to be a good option: "He may identify totally and exclusively with the past, which is a kind of death, because it means you have no future, but a suspended place" ("Toni Morrison" 1994: 112).

Conversely, the option that is offered to Son to join the blind horsemen can also be interpreted in an alternative way; Son is given the possibility to break free from the influence of white tradition and give in to the ancient properties. In the *Tar Baby* folktale, the rabbit can eventually free himself from the sticky tar baby in the same way that Son can potentially liberate himself from the influence of his very own tar baby – Jadine.

By including the character of Gideon in the novel, Morrison wishes to present the ways how white employers treat black laborers. Apart from not acknowledging their important role in acquiring wealth and privileges, Valerian does not even bother to get to know Gideon. Danielle Russell draws attention to the implications hidden behind the name the Streets use to address Gideon: "Gideon is literally defined by his "place" – he is the man of the yard – and that definition robs him of his identity, if not humanity" (2006: 41). The residents of L'Arbe de la Croix reduce Gideon's whole personality to the job that he performs for them, thus indicating that his job is the only relevant aspect of his identity. This exemplifies how people who consider themselves superior in racial or social hierarchies treat those beneath them – in a degrading manner that strips them of essential identity features.

One of the L'Arbe de la Croix residents who consider Gideon to be inferior and addresses him as Yardman even though both of them belong to the same race and work for the same employers is Sydney. Sydney thinks of himself as being on the top of the social and racial hierarchy among black people; he left Baltimore to go to Philadelphia, and "there he became one of those industrious Philadelphia Negroes – the proudest people in the race" (Morrison 1981: 61). Sydney displays internalized racism in his condescending treatment of Gideon and Son. Consequently, his niece Jadine adopts this mode of behavior from her uncle, developing a disregard for black history and culture.

In conclusion, most men that Morrison presents in *Tar Baby* (Valerian, Son, Sydney) deeply believe in the existence of racial and social hierarchies, and they seem to fail to fulfill the patriarchal roles that they take on. These three men seem adamant that their opinions are always the right ones, thus dismissing female characters' viewpoints and negatively interfering with their individuation processes.

5.4.5 Violence

As in the previous novels written by Morrison, violence continues to be a relevant topic and an important aspect that defines female characters' experiences. *Tar Baby* pictures instances of domestic violence (husband toward his wife, mother toward her child, boyfriend toward his girlfriend, and vice versa) and portrays both physical and psychological abuse. The novel also implies that female characters choose to remain silent and have trouble verbalizing violent experiences, whether they have been the victims or victimizers.

bell hooks insists that all instances of violence stem from the white tradition: "…it is the Western philosophical notion of hierarchical rule and coercive authority that is the root cause of violence against women, of adult violence against children, of all violence between those who dominate and those who are dominated" (1984: 118). While bell hooks believes that all forms of physical aggression originate from the white people's wish to establish domination and hierarchy, Morrison illustrates in the novel that violence occurs along racial lines and that it is not exclusive of any racial, social, or gender category.

Morrison exemplifies psychological, verbal abuse of women; Valerian looks down on Margaret, considers her inferior, and constantly insults her; Son offends Jadine implying that she granted sexual favors in exchange for the privileged lifestyle she enjoys and accusing her, along with all-black women, of the unforgivable crime in his opinion – willful romantic relationships with white men.

Son demonstrates negative traits of his personality – extreme jealousy, possessiveness, and aggression – before the onset of his and Jadine's relationship. Son felt upset over Gideon's thoughts about Jadine: "Didn't want her in Gideon's mind, his eye. It unnerved him to think that Gideon had looked at her at all" (Morrison 1981: 155). Son felt possessive of Jadine, believing that he was the only one who had the right to even think or talk about her. Additionally, Son admits to Jadine that he unintentionally killed his wife; he discovered that she cheated on him, and he crashed his car into the house, which consequently caught on fire, and his wife Cheyenne died. Although Jadine is aware of Son's act, she still decides to start the relationship with him. John N. Duvall suggests that many readers share Jadine's forgiving attitude: "A number of readers, though, are willing to forgive Son his killing Cheyenne – a violence that might otherwise anticipate his rape of Jadine – as an understandable male response" (2000: 111). Since Cheyenne cheated on Son, she provoked his despicable act, which is why many might feel compassion and understanding toward him. On the other hand, his aggressive behavior in this respect hinted at the possibility of a violent demeanor in the future.

Son's abusive behavior peaks when he physically hurts and rapes Jadine. Andrea O'Reilly draws attention to the language that Morrison uses to describe the unfortunate event: "We do not see Jadine's legitimate fear and the real likelihood of harm because of the farcical tone of the passage" (2004: 114). Because of the farcical language that Morrison uses, readers might miss the incidents of rape and serious physical injuries that Son imposed on Jadine. It is evident that Jadine was terrified as: "It was only ten feet off the ground and she wet her pants, but still she hollered loud enough for him to hear as well as the few people gathered on the sidewalk to watch, "You want to be a yardman all your life?"" (Morrison 1981: 265). Jadine's physical reaction testifies to her fear, and the fact that neighbors or passers-by alerted the police about the incident testifies to the dangerous situation they perceived Jadine to be in. However, the police arrived an hour later, and Andrea O'Reilly believes this delayed reaction of the police illustrates how domestic violence issues were perceived in the 1970s: "While the delay referred to in this passage may only be an accurate reflection of the racism and sexism of a 1970s New York City police force, nonetheless, it contributes to the overall trivializing and naturalizing of violence in the text" (2004: 114). The belated arrival of the police could shed light on the racist and sexist discriminatory practices, or it could draw attention to domestic violence being a

common issue in the 1970s. Additionally, by portraying that neither Son nor Margaret paid for their crimes of physical abuse, Morrison illustrates that these were common practices.

When it comes to Jadine's response to Son's aggressiveness, she initially shows typical reactions of an abused woman and forgives him. However, when he rapes her, she decides to leave him, although she does not report the crime and never tells anyone about it. John N. Duvall discusses the subtle way in which Morrison portrayed the incident: "But this rape seems almost to resist the resisting reader; that is, it is a rape that is rhetorically constructed to deny the reader's awareness of the violence" (2000: 105). It takes careful reading and great attention to detail to infer that the rape incident occurred. Perhaps the reason why Morrison chose to depict rape in this way is that she wished to draw attention to subtle instances of violence that people often neglect. Both Jadine, who is a victim, and Ondine, who is a witness to Margaret's abuse of her son, choose to remain silent about the violent acts. The novel leads readers to the inescapable conclusion that women's silence about perpetrators' violent actions allows them to continue with these acts in the future. Son caused the murder of his wife and was never punished for it, allowing him to exercise his violent behavior on Jadine. Since Jadine never reported Son for this, he might also continue treating women with aggression in the future. Patricia Hill Collins explains why black women often experience difficulty verbalizing abusive behavior: "Within the strictures of dominant gender ideology that depict Black women's sexuality as deviant, African American women often have tremendous difficulty speaking out about their abuse because the reactions that they receive from others deters them" (2004: 230). Perhaps the reason why Jadine conceals the fact that Son raped her is that she is afraid of the reactions of her family members; she is aware that all her family members have not been supportive of her relationship with Son, and by admitting that he raped her, she would show that all their assumptions about Son that have been based on his race and class are accurate.

By describing a very stereotypical event, the black man raping a black woman, Tessa Roynon believes that Morrison intended the following: "Paradoxically, it is Morrison's engagement with classical accounts of rape that draws attention to her concern with the 'reality' of sexual violence against women: with its existence and its brutality outside of non-literary, non-geopolitical realms" (2013: 34). Morrison wishes to call attention to the very present issue for black women – physical and psychological abuse that is carried out by black men, even when such confident women like Jadine are taken into consideration. Furthermore, it seems that Morrison wishes to illuminate the notion that anyone could be a potential rapist, regardless of skin color, social status, and a woman's relationship with them. This idea supports Patricia Hill Collins's claim: "One important feature of rape is that, contrary to popular opinion, it is more likely to occur between friends, loved ones, and acquaintances than between strangers. Black women typically know their rapists, and they may actually love them" (2004: 230). This is true in Jadine's case; she knew Son very well and loved him, but she understands very well that being in a relationship with him does not allow him to abuse her against her will. Perhaps the reason why Son behaved in the way that he did is that he wished to exert dominance over Jadine. As Patricia Hill Collins clearly states: "Rape is part of a system of male dominance. Recall that hegemonic masculinity is predicated upon a pecking order among men that is dependent, in part, on the sexual and physical domination of women" (2004: 225). Son comprehends the nature of his and Jadine's relationship, in which she appears to be the dominant figure as she assumes the patriarchal role of a financial provider in their union. Perhaps Son's feelings of inadequacy and inability to match Jadine in educational, working, and economic terms have made him feel insecure and forced him to resort to violence in order to show superiority. However, after the act, Son felt ashamed of himself: "He had produced that nakedness and having soiled it, it shamed him" (Morrison 1981: 272). Although Son became aware of his mistake, it was too late for him to reconcile with Jadine.

Apart from the very stereotypical example of violence with the black man as the perpetrator and the black woman as the victim, Morrison also portrays the opposite situation – the white woman abusing her son. By juxtaposing these two diametrically opposed examples of violent acts, Morrison illustrates that violence is not connected to a particular category of race, class, or gender but exists across all different categories.

5.5 From self-doubt to authenticity

Tar Baby is a novel that explores the complex themes of identity, race, social hierarchy, and cultural authenticity. In the exploration of these themes, Morrison investigates the influence of racial, social, class, and gender issues on female characters' identity development. As Margaret B. Wilkerson insightfully observed: "Morrison successfully mines the natural ore of human experience, creating believable characters who challenge ordinary notions about human behavior and who are shaped as much by their own mysterious psyches as by circumstances" (1988: 183). Characters in *Tar Baby* are complex individuals whose journeys toward self-discovery are fraught with difficulties that are caused both by their upbringing and the environment they live in. Therefore, Margaret's physical abuse of her son results from her isolated childhood and unhappy marriage; Jadine's rejection of black history and culture stem from the interracial environment she grew up in and the wealthy white world where she is educated and employed.

All the female characters construct their identities through their relationships with other characters. Jadine's desire to become an intrinsic part of the white society and her rejection of black ancestry and tradition color her journey toward self-discovery. As a total opposite to Jadine, Son rejects the white society while he fully embraces black history and culture. As Son and Jadine start their relationship, their differing personalities begin to stand out. While Son perceives Jadine as a tar baby, a symbol of the desire to fit into the white culture, Son becomes attached to the tar baby, unable to resist its influence on him. Analyzing the metaphorical meaning of the tar baby, Valerie Smith clarifies: "Son might be read as a tar baby to the extent that the other characters cannot escape his touch and are transformed by it. But he refers to Jadine as a tar baby as well, a figure created by white men's institutions to trap black men" (2012: 56). However, despite his realization that Jadine represents the tar baby, Son finds himself unable to resist her.

Son and Jadine are the prominent representatives of the binary oppositions that dominate the novel, and as Carmen Gillespie states explicitly: "Their relationship prompts the reconsideration of the hierarchies that order and control the communities the characters inhabit" (2008: 208). Both Son and Jadine are aware of the existence of hierarchies, and while Jadine perceives herself to be at the top of social, class, and racial hierarchies, Son perceives himself to be at the top of cultural and gender hierarchies. Although they belong to the same race, they discover that their differences when it comes to their social status and level of appreciation of black heritage and ancestry are insurmountable.

Jadine learns that her self-definition should not be determined by the labels and expectations placed upon her by others but that the journey toward self-discovery is her own, and she can shape and define herself the way she wishes. However, her disregard for black tradition and ancestry prevents Jadine from feeling authentic and fulfilled, which is the main reason why she decided to visit Isle des Chevaliers. Therese E. Higgins believes that *Tar Baby* intends to teach black people a lesson: "The thrust of Morrison's message is that African Americans need to, indeed have a duty to, connect with their ancestors" (2010: 45). Still, this does not mean that Morrison suggests a modern black woman should behave like Thérèse or women living in Eloe, as their complete immersion in black tradition and rejection of white

culture have deprived them of significant educational and job opportunities. Morrison implies the following idea:

> 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" ("An Interview with Toni Morrison" 1994: 178).

It seems that Morrison wishes to suggest that extreme forms of thinking and behavior are not beneficial for identity construction but that a necessary balance between treasuring the past and heritage and acknowledging modern tradition can account for a successful road toward the individuation process.

Throughout the novel, the metaphor of "tar baby" symbolizes Jadine's entrapment by societal expectations and racial stereotypes. As previously stated, in the folktale, the tar baby is a figure used to entrap the rabbit who gets stuck to the tar baby and cannot move. On a metaphorical level, both black and white communities perceive Jadine as a tar baby, as she is unable and unwilling to fully conform to either group's expectations, culture, and history. Through the metaphor of the tar baby, Morrison illuminates how societal, racial, and gender expectations can entrap one's sense of self and impede one's individuation process.

Furthermore, the novel illustrates that most characters dream of safety, the dream that began in childhood but seemed to follow the characters long into adulthood. The dream of longing for safety stemmed from the lack of safety they experienced in childhood; Jadine lost her parents, Michael was physically abused, and Margaret was alienated from family members due to her exceptional beauty. This is the reason why the characters keep pursuing certainty until they realize that safety is just a childish dream and that one can never truly be safe, as illustrated by Jadine's disappointment in Son and Ondine's revelation of Margaret's secret.

In conclusion, *Tar Baby* presents a nuanced exploration of different factors conflicting with female characters' identities, some of which include racial issues, gender, societal pressures, traumatic experiences, cultural heritage, and communal alienation. Morrison illustrates that the intersection of these factors impedes an individual's identity development. Discussing the complexities surrounding one's identity construction in the novel, Sandra Pouchet Paquet provides a relevant explanation: "In *Tar Baby*, selfhood is not conceived as a stable plateau of being separate from the world around; it is conceived as an evolving state of consciousness that is simultaneous with the interaction of conflicting values in that world" (1997: 187). Through the depiction of very different female characters, Morrison illustrates that the journey toward self-discovery is a very strenuous one, fraught with many conflicting factors and binary oppositions, influenced by family, community, and social environment, that makes an individual's quest for fulfilled life a lifelong mission.

6 *Beloved*

6.1 General introduction to *Beloved*

Beloved, published in 1987, tells the dramatic and overwhelming story about the physical and emotional consequences that slavery inflicted on black people, particularly emphasizing its impact on female characters' identity development. The novel explores numerous complex themes, such as the traumatic experience of slavery, the power of memory, the challenges of motherhood, the importance of community, and their impact on the identity construction of female characters in the wake of the historical context of slavery in the United States.

The novel is organized into three parts, each consisting of several chapters, following a non-linear narrative structure. It is set in 1873 in Cincinnati, Ohio. The novel describes the house at 124 Bluestone Road where Sethe, a former slave, lives with her daughter Denver and the mysterious presence of a ghost that the inhabitants of the house believed to be the spirit of Sethe's deceased daughter. Sethe's two sons, Howard and Buglar, who ran away from home, and Sethe's mother-in-law Baby Suggs who died in the house, used to live there too.

The arrival of Paul D, another former slave who worked on the same plantation as Sethe, evokes many painful memories as characters share information about their past. It is revealed that Sethe, born in the South to an enslaved African mother, was sold to the Garners family when she was thirteen. The Garners owned the Sweet Home plantation and practiced a benevolent form of slavery where slaves were not tortured or hurt in any way. They were entitled to their opinions and a relatively good life compared to other plantations and slaveowners. Apart from Sethe, Sweet Home was home to several enslaved men: Halle, Paul D, Paul A, Paul F, and Sixo. The Garners' generous attitude toward enslaved people allowed Sethe and Halle to get married. Sethe chose to marry Halle and not any other slave on the plantation because of his kindness, as he bought his mother's freedom by working extra hours during weekends.

However, after the death of Mr. Garner, Mrs. Garner's brother-in-law, known as the Schoolteacher, takes control over Sweet Home. The Schoolteacher criticizes Mr. Garner's treatment of slaves and incorporates several punitive measures, which is why the slaves decide to escape. Nevertheless, their attempt to run away does not go as planned. The Schoolteacher captures and kills Sixo while he brings Paul D back to Sweet Home. Despite being heavily pregnant, Sethe sends the three of her children to her mother-in-law Baby Suggs's house in Cincinnati, while she gets ready to join them. Nonetheless, in light of the recent capture of the two slaves, the Schoolteacher's nephews bring Sethe to the barn, violate her, and steal the milk her body was producing for her baby daughter. When Paul D arrives at her house, he tells Sethe that Halle saw the incident, which drove him mad. However, as Paul D himself was punished by the Schoolteacher and forced to wear an iron bit in his mouth, he could not say anything.

Devastated by such a violation of her body, Sethe reports the incident to Mrs. Garner, provoking an even more severe reaction from a Schoolteacher as he whips Sethe. Sethe still decides to continue with an escape plan and even delivers her baby in the forest with the help of a white girl Amy Denver. Amazed by Amy's kindness, Sethe decides to name her baby girl Denver. Aided by Stamp Paid, who helps fugitive slaves run away into safety, Sethe reaches Baby Suggs's house with a baby and reunites with her three children.

Sethe spends twenty-eight days in Cincinnati, spending time with her children, socializing with members of the black community, and enjoying her newly-acquired freedom. Baby Suggs takes on a role of an unofficial preacher teaching black people to come to terms with their past and look forward to the future. However, after twenty-eight days, the

Schoolteacher arrives, intending to bring Sethe and her children back to Sweet Home. Determined that she would not return to slavery and would not allow her children to become enslaved, Sethe tries to kill them. She only manages to murder the older daughter by cutting her throat with a handsaw when the Schoolteacher sees them and decides against returning them to Sweet Home. Sethe and baby Denver are taken to prison but eventually released owing to the efforts of the white abolitionists. Sethe agrees to seven minutes of sex in exchange for the word "Beloved" to be carved onto the baby's headstone. After Sethe's release from prison, all the inhabitants of the house at 124 Bluestone Road become utterly alienated from the black community, and Baby Suggs sinks into depression.

On the other hand, Paul D reveals details of his life after Sweet Home; he was sold to a slave owner whom he attempted to kill, after which he was sent to a chain gang. Luckily, he managed to escape and find Sethe, but his traumatic experiences encouraged him to keep all his memories and emotions buried in his heart.

When Paul D moves into the house at 124 Bluestone Road, he scares away the ghost, which upsets Denver, as she feels very lonely, being isolated from all family members and friends apart from her mother. However, on their way back home from a lovely day they had together at a carnival, Sethe, Denver, and Paul D see a strange woman in front of the house who calls herself Beloved. Sethe and Denver believe that Beloved could be Sethe's murdered daughter who returned to her family, while Paul D thinks she is an intruder and should not be allowed to stay. Nevertheless, Beloved exerts her influence on Paul D and seduces him. However, when Stamp Paid informs Paul D of the infanticide Sethe committed, Paul D leaves the house. The attachment between Beloved and Sethe intensifies when Beloved becomes increasingly demanding of Sethe's attention while Sethe does everything she can to satisfy her wishes; she even leaves her job and stops caring for Denver. Fearing for her mother, Denver finds a job and seeks help from the community that eventually organizes the exorcism of Beloved. When Mr. Bodwin, whose family helped Baby Suggs when she first came into town and gave her the house at 124 Bluestone Road, comes to take Denver to her new job, Sethe mistakes him for a Schoolteacher and runs toward him, wishing to hurt him in order to protect her family. The black women who came to exorcise Beloved stopped Sethe, after which Beloved disappeared. Paul D, having thought about the infanticide and started to accept Sethe's reasons for it, realizes that he wishes to stay with Sethe, so he returns to the house at 124 Bluestone Road and finds Denver, fully independent and intent on pursuing education and work. He also finds Sethe in deep mourning for Beloved.

When it comes to the historical context of *Beloved*, Morrison incorporated elements of the factual events from Margaret Garner's life. The character of Sethe was inspired by Margaret, who also escaped slavery. When she learned about the slaveowner coming to bring her and her children back to slavery, she decided to murder them, but she succeeded in murdering only one. Angela Davis quotes Margaret's excitement over her act: "She rejoiced that the girl was dead – "now she would never know what a woman suffers as a slave" – and pleaded to be tried for murder. "I will go singing to the gallows rather than be returned to slavery!"" (1982: 205). After infanticide, Margaret was arrested and then returned to slavery. Ironically, she was not arrested for murder, "[…] instead she was convicted and sentenced for the real crime of stealing property from her owner" (Ying 2006: 48), as children born in slavery were considered to belong to slaveowners and not their parents.

By utilizing the factual and deeply harrowing story from Margaret Garner's life, Morrison blends historical facts with imaginative fiction to paint the picture of the traumatizing female experiences during and after slavery. In a documentary about her life and work titled *The Pieces I Am*, Morrison emphasizes that there were no narratives about slave women and that her intention was "to talk about a woman who had to make some choices about slavery, about motherhood, about love, about parenting, that had nothing to do with being a victim. A

real woman, a historical figure as a matter of fact, who was anything but a victim" (*Toni Morrison - The Pieces I Am*, 1:21:34-1:21:58). Despite their victimized status in slavery, Margaret Garner and Sethe both exercise freedom in their decisions, as they are the ones who decide to change their positions from victims into victimizers and murder their children rather than have them return to slavery.

When it comes to the subject matter of *Beloved*, Angela Davis believes that its publication was "an extraordinary turning point in the history of this country, I would say in the history of the world" (*Toni Morrison - The Pieces I Am*, 1:22:17-1:22:26), as Morrison presented the point of view of those who were silenced and whose voice had never been heard, and "because she urged us to imagine people who were slaves as human beings, individuals with subjectivity, who also loved, who also had imaginations, even as they were subjected to the most horrendous forms of oppression" (*Toni Morrison - The Pieces I Am,* 1:22:26-1:22:51). By illustrating the disastrous consequences of slavery on individual families and depicting their viewpoints, Morrison offers instances of personalized history and provokes compassion and sympathy toward the oppressed ones.

Dedicated to the Africans who died as the result of the Atlantic slave trade, *Beloved* investigates the legacy of slavery and its impact on the communal and familial life of black people, their mental well-being, and motherhood challenges that black women faced, and places particular emphasis on how traumatic experiences shaped the lives of the characters. In order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the confluence of factors that threaten female characters' identity construction in the novel, it seems imperative to employ the intersectional analysis of relevant perspectives.

6.2 Conflicts of female identity from diversified perspectives

While the historical perspective on slavery does seem to dominate the identity construction of female characters in *Beloved*, it is not the only one that should be employed in the analysis of characters' personalities. According to Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins, "poor African American women seemingly experience the triple oppression of race, gender, and class" (2016: 7), which is primarily demonstrated in the novel, as female characters are formerly enslaved people who throughout slavery and in its aftermath experience oppression and physical and psychological abuse due to their inferior position on social, class, gender, and racial hierarchies. Additionally, female characters suffer through profound traumatic experiences that negatively impact their already challenging journey toward self-discovery.

Regarding the importance of the intersection of racial, class, and gender categories, Andersen and Collins make an important observation: "One of the most important things to learn about race, class, and gender is that they are *systemic forms of inequality*. Although most people tend to think of them as individual characteristics (or identities), they are built into the very structure of society" (2016: 51). Therefore, social analysis cannot be separated from the studies of race, gender, and class, as understanding the inequality and oppression of a particular group of people requires the intersectional analysis of all these categories. Moreover, in order to comprehend individual traumatic experiences and their impact on one's identity development, it is essential to analyze the historical events, gender and racial relations, class stratification, as well as social connections among community members that build the framework of the society where a particular group of people lives.

Discussing her primary area of interest while writing *Beloved*, Toni Morrison explains: "I'm trying to explore how a people – in this case one individual or a small group of individuals – absorbs and rejects information on a very personal level about something [slavery] that is

undigestible and unabsorbable, completely" ("Talk with Toni Morrison" 1994: 235). Given the complexity of the subject matter of the traumatic experience of slavery and the difficulty of depicting these experiences verbally, it is necessary to incorporate the narratological analysis, which will explore all the narrative strategies that Morrison employed in order to describe traumatic events.

In order to gain insight into the causes of female characters' identity crises, it is necessary to observe the interconnectedness of several factors, such as historical, political, and social perspectives, Black feminist criticism, psychoanalytical perspective with a particular emphasis on trauma studies, as well as employ narratological analysis and investigate how the narrative texts reflect all the complex topics discussed in the novel.

6.2.1 Historical and political perspectives

Beloved is set in 1873, after the end of the American Civil War and Abraham Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, which declared all enslaved people free. The novel tackles both the period of slavery and its aftermath, depicting brutal atrocities against enslaved people and the struggles of the former slaves to build their lives after the abolition of slavery.

The novel is set in Cincinnati, Ohio. This city had a very strategic position as it was located on the border between the North and the South and was, therefore, home to many formerly enslaved people who managed to escape. By portraying challenges that black people faced both during and after slavery, Morrison criticizes both the institution of slavery that accounted for violence, exploitation, and dehumanization of black people and the period after the Civil War and the abolition of slavery, when black people faced many issues such as poverty, discrimination and psychological consequences of traumatic experiences in their attempt to rebuild their lives as free people.

Slavery was immensely important for establishing capitalism in the United States and for the tremendous economic and financial success that slaveowners achieved. However, the concept of slavery was based on racial discrimination and the complete negation of human rights. Patricia Hill Collins clarifies the position of black people in the institution of slavery: "Under chattel slavery, people of African descent occupied a particular place in class relations – their bodies and all that was contained in those bodies (labor, sexuality, and reproduction) were objectified and turned into commodities that were traded in the marketplace" (2004: 55). The institution of slavery was based on the existence of racial and social hierarchies where it was presumed that black people, due to the color of their skin and low social and class position, occupy the bottom of the hierarchy and therefore can be treated as objects that can be controlled, taken advantage of, and sold. Collins further explains: "Dehumanizing Black people by defining them as nonhuman and as animals was a critical feature of racial oppression" (2004: 55). Slaveowners treated slaves as if they were animals: they used them for backbreaking labor, exploited them economically and sexually, forcing them to reproduce so that new generations of slaves would be provided. In order to ensure their compliance, slaveowners used the oppressive forms of "lynching and rape" (Collins 2004: 64).

The brutal treatment of slaves completely deprived them of their identities. Slaves were subjected to complete dominion over their bodies, rights, and choices. They were prohibited from having personal possessions, expressing opinions, starting families, or forming friendships. As Milton Meltzer claims, even their children did not belong to them: "The slave is the child of his slave mother and is subject to the same fate" (1971: 5). Discussing the destruction of slaves' identities, Alvin O. Thompson comments: "The enslaver's divestment of the name, language and religion of the enslaved person was an attempt to destroy that

individual's identity and recreate him or her in the image of the enslaver. It may be regarded, in today's terminology, as a form of identity theft" (2006: 22). Enslaved people were deprived of naming their children and carrying the name that their parents chose for them, as illustrated by Paul A, Paul D, and Paul F, all given the same names with the different last letter, all forced to take on the identity feature ascribed to them by the slaveowner. Additionally, black slaves were devoid of all traditional signifiers of their culture; most of them forgot about their native language and other elements of cultural heritage, thus being unable to pass these down to future generations. Morrison demonstrates this in the novel by portraying Sethe, who vaguely remembers that her mother spoke another language, while she cannot say a word of it.

When it comes to physical abuse, the worst form of it was the sexual exploitation of female slaves. Catherine Clinton mentions how white slaveowners ensured their acts of violence toward slaves were legal: "Within the Old South, a slave woman was denied the power of consent by legal definition: she could not be raped. This was not neglectful, but deliberate avoidance" (1994: 206). Slaves were not entitled to any legal rights, meaning their slaveowners could exploit them in any way they saw fit. Moreover, that also meant that slaves could not rely on legal institutions to protect themselves; as Clinton further elaborates: "By law if a slave woman raised her hand against a white man, even to protect her own body, she was committing crime" (1994: 211). The conclusion can be drawn that the law was manipulated to serve white supremacy.

In a discussion on slavery, Toni Morrison suggests that the overall white population can be accounted for its existence: "The justification for enslavement became accepted wisdom and a whole race of people became criminalized" (2019: 41). Even though there were white people who did not support the institution of slavery and those who practiced it more mildly and humanely than others, the fact is that the white population as a whole allowed this system of oppression and total rejection of human rights based on racial discrimination.

In *Beloved*, Morrison portrays slavery as the collective traumatic experience black people share. As noted by Rossitsa Terzieva, "In *Beloved*, Morrison explores the loss of the unified self in the specific context of slavery, which deprives men and women equally of their humanity" (2010: 192). By offering experiences of former slaves, Morrison illustrates how slavery affected not only individuals, but black families, friendships, and the black community as a whole. Morrison also explores a very sensitive topic of possession in the novel. As Claudine Raynaud insightfully observes: "Selfhood is impossible when one does not own oneself" (2007: 53). Slaves were not allowed to possess anything in both the literal and metaphorical sense of the word, as they could not own material goods, but they also could not have a family, partner, children, or establish any meaningful social relationships. While slaves were encouraged and very often forced to reproduce in order to enlarge slaveowners' workforce, they were not allowed to consider these children as their own as they could have been taken away from them, sold, abused, or even killed if the slaveowner considered one of these acts necessary.

Furthermore, Morrison demonstrates the grave danger that recently freed slaves pose once they discover what it means to possess something. Although Morrison warns that: "Freeing yourself was one thing; claiming ownership of that freed self was another" (2005: 111), she portrays the protagonist Sethe claiming ownership of her children that legally did not belong to her. For Sethe, murdering her children and herself is a preferred option to returning to slavery. Anita Durkin analyses Sethe's attempted act: "Significantly, however, Sethe's marking of the children is not a signification of a particular identity so much as it is a *negation* of another loathed identity, a sign declaring that these children are *not* slaves" (2009: 187). With her determination to murder her children and herself and with partial success of her goal, Sethe wishes to show to the slaveowner that she is the one who is in charge of her children and herself, and not him. On the other hand, the slaveowner followed the Fugitive Slave Law when

he came looking for his runaway slaves. Carmen Gillespie clarifies the content of the law: “The act enabled slaveholders to reclaim African Americans who had run away on the basis of the word of the slaveholder. Proof of “ownership” was no longer required” (2008: 322). The Fugitive Slave Law required the return of the slaves to their owner, even if they escaped to a free state, as was the case with Sethe and her children. In this regard, Sethe’s maternal claim opposes the slave owner’s legal property claim, and miraculously, Sethe wins, as the slaveowner loses his interest after witnessing the murder of the baby girl.

When it comes to the slaveowners, Morrison emphasizes the fact that not all slaveowners were like the infamous Schoolteacher and his nephews, who treated slaves as animals, whipping them, abusing Sethe while she was pregnant, observing them from the scientific perspective, writing about their characteristics and behavior and comparing them to animals. Contrary to the Schoolteacher, Mr. Garner never mistreated his slaves, raped the women, or tortured them. He even allowed Halle to buy off the freedom for his mother and let Halle and Sethe get married. Still, despite his best intentions, it can be argued whether Mr. Garner was as kind and noble as it seemed. According to Missy Dehn Kubitschek, “*Beloved* demonstrates that slavery was never benign, no matter how “good” the master” (1998: 126). Mr. Garner deceived his slaves by giving them the wrong idea about what slavery meant, resulting in them thinking that they were independent and possessed a certain amount of freedom, which was not the case. Mr. Garner never officially freed them; he owned and benefited from their work. Arlene R. Keizer makes a valid conclusion regarding Mr. Garner’s treatment of slaves: “In general, the Garners represent a milder (but in some ways more subtle and insidious) form of ideological domination of African Americans than one generally assumes of slaveholders” (2004: 28). Simply because Mr. Garner did not let his slaves starve and did not abuse them, does not mean that he genuinely cared about them and had best interests at heart for them. Perhaps he wanted to motivate them to perform better at work, or maybe he did not believe in employing coercive methods. If he had thought that enslaved people were entitled to their own opinions, wishes, and possessions, he would have freed them, and he would not have supported the institution of slavery by owning slaves. After the death of Mr. Garner and the arrival of a brutal Schoolteacher who took control of Sweet Home, it became clear to the slaves how cruel slavery can be. As observed by Aoi Mori, “Establishment of the absolute hierarchical order of slavery at Sweet Home by Schoolteacher brings about abrupt change for the slaves, indicating that slaves’ lives are always threatened, no matter how humane and benign their masters are” (1999: 45). The arrival of Schoolteacher showed to the slaves that Mr. Garner was not such a kind and thoughtful master after all, as he did not consider the possibility of what would happen to slaves once he is not there to take care of them. Additionally, Mrs. Garner’s fear that she was not safe being surrounded by enslaved black people all by herself and her invitation to a Schoolteacher to take over Sweet Home is yet another testament to the fact that the Garners were not such benevolent masters and that they did indeed support the institution of slavery.

When conversing about Schoolteacher’s behavior toward enslaved people, it is noteworthy to observe that he exemplifies the majority of white slave owners, and, as Margaret Atwood notably remarks: “Slavery is also presented to us as a paradigm of how most people behave when they are given absolute power over other people” (1993: 34). As illustrated by Schoolteacher, granting any particular group of people autocratic power will lead to their belief in their superiority and establishment of hierarchy over other groups of people, mainly if this division among groups is based on a socially constructed category, such as the race. Atwood further comments: “It’s no coincidence that the first of the deadly sins, from which all the others were supposed to stem, is Pride, a sin of which Sethe is, incidentally, also accused” (1993: 34). Atwood makes an analogy between Schoolteacher and Sethe, believing that both of them are guilty of being too proud of their possessions; Schoolteacher takes great pride in possession of

slaves, and Sethe takes pride in her belief that her children belong to her and not the slaveowner and their feelings of fierce pride encourage them to commit some unforgivable immoral crimes.

When it comes to writing *Beloved*, while it is evident that Morrison incorporated historical elements into her writing, she explains that listing historical facts was not her primary concern: "First was my effort to substitute and rely on memory rather than history because I knew I could not, should not, trust recorded history to give me the insight into the cultural specificity I wanted" (2019: 336). Unlike historical books and slave narratives primarily written from the point of view of white people who controlled the writing and publication of books, Morrison intended to depict the individual experiences of those oppressed whose stories were never heard. Marilyn Sanders Mobley explains that, by doing so, Morrison brings the concealed truth behind the real atrocities of slavery to the fore: "[…] she seeks to make slavery accessible to readers for whom slavery is not a memory, but a remote historical fact to be ignored, repressed or forgotten" (1993: 358). Morrison provides insight into the daily life of slaves with all the difficulties they had to endure, but she also sheds light on the challenging life of the freed slaves, showing that the consequences of slavery continued to haunt them many years after slavery was abolished. Additionally, Morrison forces readers to perceive enslaved people as human beings, with all their personal wishes, interests, and traumas, illustrating that they are, in Arlene R. Keizer's words, "repositories of knowledge – practical, historical, and spiritual" (2004: 31). Enslaved people's perspectives are relevant, as they reveal valuable information on the critical period in the American history, while their history and cultural heritage partly account for the present-day feature of the diversity of the country that the United States of America is very proud of.

Nevertheless, Morrison does not write *Beloved* as a historical account of past events, but she incorporates several different perspectives and literary techniques in her presentation of the painful history of slavery. As Barbara Hill Rigney shrewdly observes: "Yet she is also concerned with the interaction of history with art, theory, and even fantasy, for, in her terms, history itself may be no more than a brutal fantasy, a nightmare half-remembered, in which fact and symbol become indistinguishable" (1991: 61). Throughout the whole novel, history is intertwined with magical elements, memories, and traumas, demonstrating the inability to get a hold of the entire truth when it comes to the narration of the past.

6.2.2 Social perspective

Social perspective plays a critical role in one's journey toward self-discovery, as it influences how an individual perceives and understands themselves in society, shapes one's relationships with others, and impacts an individual's beliefs, attitudes, and values. As noted by Florian Coulmas, "Identity, norms, and social categories together define people's social position and influence their decisions" (2019: 45). From the social perspective, slaves' and former slaves' identity development is significantly threatened, as they were considered to occupy the bottom of social hierarchy, and their position in the society impeded their social relationships with others, their knowledge of cultural heritage and tradition, their sense of belonging to a community and their understanding of their ethnic origin.

One of the devastating consequences of slavery is the slaves' ignorance of basic information that determines one's personal identity. Most enslaved and formerly enslaved people have limited knowledge of their names, families, relatives, and essential elements of their culture and ancestry. With reference to this, Herbert William Rice remarks: "Like Sethe, Paul D and Baby Suggs are divided selves. They do not know the intimate details of themselves – their names, their hands, their hearts, their past. Slavery has stolen vital parts of themselves" (1996: 109). The fact that the three brothers (Paul A, D, F) have the same name and are only

distinguished by the last letter shows how dehumanizing slavery was; it deprived people of having a name given to them by their parents. Aoi Mori draws attention to the importance of names with regard to the concept of identity: "The discovery of one's own name is essential to the discovery of identity; names and naming function in the development of awareness of one's embodied self and his/her relation to the past" (1999: 54). While the names that slaveowners gave to their slaves indicated the nature of their relationship and authoritarian control that masters had over slaves, it also signified the lack of connection between children and their parents, as family names evoke ancestral bonds. Additionally, Sethe mentions that she can barely remember her mother, who showed her the scars from the physical abuse she suffered so that Sethe could tell her apart from other slaves. Enslaved people were denied a chance to learn about their personality traits, develop their hobbies and talents, establish their own families, and form friendships. Sethe feels terribly disappointed when she learns that she will not have a wedding party with Halle, although she fails to realize that she is lucky to have been given the opportunity to start a family with a partner of her choice, the privilege that most slaves were not granted. Arlene R. Keizer analyzes Sethe's reaction to the absence of formal festivities: "Sethe's response – improvising a wedding dress out of everyday scraps of material – marks the slave's aspiration to full subjectivity, her rejection of the master and mistress's interpellation" (2004: 28). Sethe's making of her wedding dress symbolizes her desire for the fundamental human rights that enslaved people were not entitled to. It also symbolizes the notion that white and black people, despite the white people's best efforts to prove otherwise, share common wishes, hopes, and interests.

Another point worthy of critical attention is that enslavement erased cultural elements of common tradition and ancestry, which are essential prerequisites for a unified community. As James M. Ivory keenly observes: "Colonial conquests often lead to the colonized culture's defamation" (2003: 33). Sethe mentions that she forgot how to speak the African language that she spoke as a child and consequently, she is unable to pass down the knowledge of her native language, traditional customs, and culture to her children. Sethe is aware of the impossibility of remembering her mother tongue: "What Nan told her she had forgotten, along with the language she told it in. The same language her ma'am spoke, and which would never come back" (Morrison 2005: 74). Slaves and formerly enslaved people are permanently disconnected from their origin and heritage, while simultaneously prevented from assimilating into their new environment. Arlene R. Keizer continues the discussion by saying: "On the other hand, she recognizes that she has been robbed of mothering and her first language – in short, her birthright. This knowledge has not just drifted away; it has been taken from her by the slave system" (2004: 34). Apart from depriving enslaved children of an opportunity to learn about their cultural heritage and ancestry, the children born into slavery were denied a family; most of them, such as Sethe, did not even know their father, while their mothers did arduous work and could not attend to their children's needs.

Another important point that should be considered is the enslaved people's and former slaves' feelings of belonging and homeownership. James M. Ivory elaborates on the meaning of "home" for black people: "The idea of home for the descendants of African slaves is one where home is and is not Africa, and home is and is not America: "home" is lost and gained, gained and lost" (2003: 31). The word "home" has dual significance for black people as it indicates the literal meaning of the house where people dwell and gather their family, and the possession of such a house had long been an unattainable goal for enslaved people. On the other hand, the metaphorical meaning of home symbolizes the notion that black people have an impression that they are homeless and that they do not belong anywhere; they do not belong in Africa, as they were forcefully moved from their motherland and encouraged to forget everything related to their place of origin, however, they also do not belong in the United States of America, where they do not feel welcomed as their past experiences were fraught with

oppression, abuse, and dehumanization. In the novel, Morrison emphasizes the importance of the house where Sethe lives, using personification to attribute some human characteristics to it (by saying that "124 was spiteful" (Morrison 2005: 3), "124 was loud" (Morrison 2005: 199), "124 was quiet", Morrison 2005: 281)), when these attributes actually describe the feelings of the residents of the house. Joe Sutliff Sanders reiterates the importance of possession for former slaves by making an analogy between the possession of the house and possession of the children: "Finally, Beloved the ghost and 124 Bluestone Road the haunted house work splendidly to foreground one of the novel's most powerful themes: possession. […] a central issue is possession: who belongs to whom, who has a claim on whom, and who owns what" (2003: 143). Morrison illustrates how difficult it is for former slaves to get a hold of something and simultaneously how easy it is for them to get used to the idea of owning something. Due to poverty and limited job opportunities because of racist discrimination, former slaves were struggling to make ends meet, let alone buy their own property. The only reason why Sethe lived in the house at 124 Bluestone Road was because of the generous act of Mr. and Miss Bodwin, who did not need it and let Baby Suggs live there once she became a free citizen. However, when Sethe realized that she could own something or someone, that her children were hers to love and care for them and not the Schoolteacher's, she understood that the possession of her children meant she had unlimited power when it came to their lives.

When discussing the social perspective, it is necessary to mention that, despite the oppressed status of both slave men and women, their social position was not the same. bell hooks sheds light on the similarities between the treatment of black men and women: "A measure of social equality existed between the sexes in the area of work but nowhere else" (1982: 45). While both men and women were expected to perform back-breaking work under challenging conditions, enslaved women were considered slightly superior to enslaved men in the eyes of the slaveholders, as they could exploit them sexually and thus provide new generations of slaves. Although this meant that female slaves were more valuable to slaveholders, it also meant that they were often exposed to other forms of physical and psychological abuse; apart from being raped, they were also forced to accept that the children born in slavery were not theirs and that they were rarely given an opportunity to care for them and watch them grow. As Claudia Jones emphasizes: "Actually, the history of the Negro woman shows that the Negro mother under slavery held a key position and played a dominant role in her own family grouping" (1995: 112). Given the fact that fathers of slave children were often unknown, absent, or not interested in accepting the slave child as their own, as in the case of slaveowners, it appears natural that slave mothers were the ones that occupied the dominant position within a family. However, even though slaveowners denied the patriarchal institutions of a family and marriage to slaves, they could not forbid the existence of maternal instincts. In this way, slavery completely shattered the patriarchal family institution among slaves.

Taking social perspective into account, it seems significant to focus on the ambiguous nature of morality in the novel. From a social perspective, ethical norms refer to principles and modes of behavior considered right or wrong in society. The novel demonstrates that moral standards and values are primarily determined by historical factors, the traumatic experiences of an individual, and the social context in which the individual lives. As illustrated by Sethe's act of murdering her daughter, an act that is considered to be morally questionable by other characters in the novel, the social and historical context of slavery and the absence of communal support provided the framework for Sethe's behavior. Trudier Harris lays out the dilemma concerning Sethe's act: "Does a woman who has birthed a child have the right to claim it to the extent that she can kill it rather than allow it to be killed? Under what conditions is death preferable to a lack of freedom? And who is empowered to make that decision?" (2010: 31). While Sethe's act can be rationalized when historical circumstances and her good motherly intentions are taken into consideration, it is still ethically debatable whether a mother is entitled

to make such crucial decisions when it comes to her children's lives. The black community, Sethe's family members, and even the white Schoolteacher and sheriff who provoked Sethe's act all condemn her and consider her act morally unacceptable. Their reactions to Sethe's act are blatantly obvious, the black community ostracizes Sethe, Sethe's sons run away from home, Denver feels frightened of her mother, and the Schoolteacher abandons the site and his intention of returning his former slaves to Sweet Home. Linda Wagner-Martin describes Baby Suggs' reaction: "In the fact of Baby Suggs' death, Morrison also implies the stridency of moral judgments: Baby Suggs' denunciation of Sethe's violent act is her choice to die" (2015: 70). Aware that she cannot judge her daughter-in-law due to hopelessness of Sethe's situation and particularly difficult decision she had had to make, Baby Suggs gives up on life, on her remaining family members, and her preaching activities.

When it comes to Sethe's morally questionable act, Terry Otten insists that the institution of slavery should be blamed: "The moral authority of *Beloved* resides less in a revelation of the obvious horrors of slavery than in a revelation of slavery's nefarious ability to invert moral categories and behavior and to impose tragic choice" (1989: 82). It is evident that Sethe's love for her children is unconditional and, if it had not been for life-threatening circumstances, she would have never physically harmed any of her children. Additionally, it seems that Morrison wishes to suggest that the black community condemns Sethe to a much larger extent than they do the institution of slavery that forced her to commit such an act. The black community appears to agree with the white community that Sethe's behavior is contemptible; it is ironic that the newspaper disapprovingly reported on Sethe's murder of her daughter while it failed to report on the inhumane treatment of slaves that persuaded slaves into committing such acts. In their attitudes toward Sethe, both the black and white communities show hypocritical standpoints.

Furthermore, Morrison shows that the binary concepts of "good" and "evil" cannot be attributed to a particular race. While most of the white slaveowners are depicted as brutal and cruel, Morrison portrays several kind and helpful white people, such as Mr. and Mrs. Garner, who practice a benevolent form of slavery, and Mr. and Miss Bodwin, who assisted Baby Suggs when she became a free citizen and Denver when she needed help, and Amy Denver who helped Sethe deliver her baby. On the other hand, some of the black people in the novel also display negative characteristics. Terry Otten provides examples: "Evil persists in the "meanness" of the blacks who refuse to warn Sethe about the white men come to reclaim her, in the well-intended Stamp Paid's betrayal of Sethe's past, in Paul D's cowardly retreat, and most profoundly, in Sethe's criminal love itself" (1989: 82). As much as Sethe's celebration of her and her children's escape from slavery appeared pompous to the black community, it is inexcusable that they turned a blind eye to the Schoolteacher's arrival. Additionally, as much as the black community, Stamp Paid, and Paul D thought of Sethe's murdering of her daughter as immoral, all of them experienced atrocities of slavery and should have been more sympathetic and understanding. Consequently, by offering a myriad of white and black characters displaying different levels of understanding and judging morality, Morrison shows that displaying ethical behavior and moral values is unrelated to skin color.

6.2.3 Black feminist criticism

From a black feminist perspective, the identity development of female characters can be analyzed by observing racial, gender, and economic oppression brought about by slavery. While the institution of slavery impacted the overall black community, it can be argued that female slaves suffered in a different way than men, as slavery for women also included sexual

exploitation, forced separation of children from their mothers, and psychological consequences due to their inability to perform a mother's role.

Speaking of the consequences that slavery imposed on black slaves, bell hooks offers a theoretical perspective that scholars have presented:

> Sexist historians and sociologists have provided the American public with a perspective on slavery in which the most cruel and de-humanizing impact of slavery on the lives of black people was that black men were stripped of their masculinity, which they then argue resulted in the dissolution and overall disruption of any black familial structure. (1982: 20).

While it is very hard to determine whether men or women suffered more when such demeaning treatment of human beings is taken into consideration, the reality is that both sexes endured cruel physical and psychological forms of abuse. Although women were also sexually exploited, the men related to them, such as their fathers, husbands, and brothers, often had to observe and tolerate this behavior and could do nothing to protect the women they cared about. While this definitely had severe repercussions on their mental well-being, it also meant that men could not perform the traditional patriarchal duties of being protectors and providers, the duties that are ingrained in patriarchal institutions and conventional gender roles among all races.

While it is evident that traditional patriarchal gender roles could not be established among slaves, Patricia Hill Collins proposes her view on the subject: "Regardless of race, ethnicity, social class, citizenship status, and sexual orientation, all men and women encounter social norms about gender. These norms influence people's sense of themselves as men and women as well as perceptions of masculinity and femininity" (2004: 6). As Collins suggests, all men and women, regardless of their racial, social, and class circumstances, are aware of their gender and specific roles that are associated with that gender. Slavery fragments gender roles by prohibiting the institution of marriage among slaves, sexually exploiting black women, forcing them to get pregnant and then taking their children away, stripping male slaves of their masculinity, and not allowing them to protect their partners, sisters, and daughters.

When it comes to the construction of one's identity, Arlene R. Keizer emphasizes that black people encountered many difficulties on their road to self-discovery due to the color of their skin: "Morrison is pointing to the fact that the stability of imagining oneself as a whole – as an autonomous liberal subject – was available to white male and some white female subjects in the era of U.S. slavery" (2004: 29). Due to racist discrimination, economic oppression, physical and psychological abuse, sexual exploitation, and complete absence of free will when it comes to their personal names, sexual freedom, the right to start a family, gain education, get a job, and many other forms of dehumanization, slaves' identity was fragmented, and identity crises were inevitable. Keizer further continues the discussion: "In *Beloved*, black individuals and the African American community try to construct and maintain a sense of selfhood under the pressure of atomizing injunctions from those in power" (2004: 30). While Mr. Garner grants many privileges to his slaves which create illusions in their minds that they are in charge of their self-definition, the arrival of Schoolteacher shows that slaves can never be free on their road to self-discovery and that their self-description belongs to those who legally own them and who occupy a much higher position on a racial hierarchy.

Discussing the differences between male and female gender, Robert Samuels believes that these differences are annihilated when black slaves are considered and that Morrison's portrayal of the slave ship in *Beloved* proves this notion: "In fact, in the central cultural primal scene that determines the novel, Morrison describes the way that the slave ships and slavery in

general worked to destroy sexual identifies and any concept of individuality" (2001: 129). White people's savage treatment of black people on slave ships shows that slaveowners did not make any difference between male and female slaves and dealt with them with equal levels of brutality. Samuels continues: "In the horrid conditions of the slave ship, all differences between self and Other, male and female are broken down and eliminated" (2001: 129). The fact that slaveowners wished to obliterate important aspects of slaves' identities suggests that one of the implications of the institution of slavery is the total destruction of enslaved people's identities.

Regarding the differences between male and female slaves, Patricia Hill Collins keenly observes: "Black women were workers like men, and they did hard manual labor. But because they were women, Black women's sexuality and reproductive capacity presented opportunities for forms of sexual exploitation and sexual slavery" (2004: 55). In terms of labor, slaveowners did not make any differences between the male and female slaves and they expected all of them to carry out grueling physical work. However, when it comes to female slaves, they also expected them to reproduce so that the next generation of slaves could be ensured without spending money on purchasing additional slaves.

Frances Beale depicts the actual depth of enslaved women's difficult position:

> Her physical image has been maliciously maligned; she has been sexually molested and abused by the white colonizer; she has suffered the worst kind of economic exploitation, having been forced to serve as the white woman's maid and wet nurse for white offspring while her own children were more often than not starving and neglected (1970: 112).

Apart from being sexually abused and forced to give birth to as many babies as possible to support the maintenance and growth of the institution of slavery, enslaved black women were also expected to nurture and take care of white people's children, which also included nursing them if their own mothers were unable or unwilling to do so. This resulted in both a lack of milk and a lack of time that female slaves had for their children, which further contributed to the fragmentation of black families.

Sexual exploitation of black female slaves took its toll on the overall black community. Catherine Clinton elucidates: "Slaves saw rape as part of a continuum of humiliation, coercion, and abuse. Although each and every slave might not have been subjected to assaults, all slaves were brutalized by indignities and felt the shame and dishonor the system fostered. Women wore the brunt" (1994: 210). The whole black community felt mortified about this form of physical abuse; not only the black women who were raped, but also their family members, friends, and other slaves living in the same community as none of them could do anything to protect female slaves and end this inhumane treatment of women.

Analyzing the white people's physical abuse of Sethe, Barbara Hill Rigney sheds light on additional consequences of the sexual exploitation of black women: "Thus the white masters not only violate Sethe in an act comparable to rape, but they also violate the sacred state of motherhood and the African spiritual values which, for Morrison, that state represents" (1991: 68). When Schoolteacher's nephews steal Sethe's milk, they deprive Sethe of fulfilling her maternal role and providing her baby with milk. This act hurts Sethe to a much larger degree than the lynching she suffers through, as she considers motherhood to be the most relevant aspect of her personality. Apart from harming the institution of motherhood, the sexual exploitation of female slaves also leads to psychological consequences, including post-traumatic stress disorder, which does not allow formerly enslaved people to rebuild their lives after slavery. This is evident in Sethe's case; even after gaining freedom from slavery, Sethe

cannot move away from the traumatic experiences as her thoughts and actions are metaphorically enslaved by the past.

It is noteworthy to mention that Sethe did rebel against the Schoolteacher's nephews' treatment of her and complained to Mrs. Garner about it. However, Mrs. Garner proved powerless to do anything about vicious behavior toward Sethe, but cry. Amy M. Green considers this scene from the novel to have a significant metaphorical significance: "This scene acts as a larger indictment against members of the white slaveholding community who ultimately failed to speak out against the inhumanity of the institution, whether out of fear or out of desire to protect their financial investment" (2010: 129). Mrs. Garner's inability to act upon what she considers to be the unfair treatment of slaves illustrates that even white people who were not supportive of the cruel treatment of black slaves proved to be unable or unwilling to make changes that would encourage the abolition of slavery.

Nevertheless, as intolerable and unjust as slavery was, especially to female slaves, it also encouraged black women to be strong and not give up in the face of difficulties. According to Paula Giddings, "But Black women may have been the only group in America able to see not only the degradation but the triumph of transcending what the system would make of them" (1984: 87). As evidenced by several strong women in *Beloved*, such as Sethe, Ella, and Baby Suggs for most of her life, black women showed that they were strong and resilient and that they did not give up on life and fighting for their future even at the most challenging times of their lives. Although Baby Suggs did not know where her children were and if they were alive, she still assisted Sethe in her escape and took care of her children while Sethe was trying to run away, and she served as an unofficial preacher for the black community, helping them to overcome their traumas. On the other hand, Ella was physically and psychologically abused by her masters but still tried to move on with her life. Sethe displayed the strength of her character on many occasions when she escaped from slavery while heavily pregnant, when she decided to murder her children rather than have them returned to slavery, and when she continued living in a house at Bluestone Road 124, providing for Denver and taking care of her even though her children ran away, her mother-in-law gave up on life, and the whole black community ostracized her. Giddings suggests that black women wished to show that they could rise above the institution of slavery: "The lesson that the Black women were trying to impart was that color, class, or the experience of slavery did not nullify the moral strength of true womanhood" (1984: 88). Despite the economic, psychological, and sexual oppression that they suffered through, black women took great pride in their mental willpower. However, Giddings expresses black women's concern that perhaps at times, they were too resilient and too strong: "Black women were proud that they were strong, that they were responsible, but wondered if they were too strong, both for the good of their men and the good of the race" (1984: 324). In some cases, the strength and willpower of women proved to be very threatening to men; in *Beloved*, Halle suffered a mental breakdown when he witnessed the violation of his wife, while Sethe overcame that humiliating moment and was able to continue living her life; moreover, Paul D was terrified to learn that Sethe murdered her daughter, breaking off his relationship with her and running away when he heard about it, while Sethe displayed her strength in her willingness and ability to kill her daughter rather than have her taken away to slavery. Perhaps these brave actions of women also impede men's awareness of their masculinity and not just the institution of slavery.

Another positive trait that developed from slavery is the increased unity of the black community. As noted by Patricia Hill Collins: "More than three hundred years of legalized racial subordination in the United States convinced most African-Americans that sticking together and remaining unified could mean the difference between survival and death" (1998: 24). Sharing a commonly forgotten ancestry and cultural tradition, sharing common struggles, and being exposed to similar traumatic experiences helped the black community understand

the importance of cooperation as they shared the common goal – the desire to survive the humiliated forms of oppression that were based on racial discrimination. This sense of unity remained very important for black communities, as is exemplified in *Beloved*, where members of the black community helped fellow black people escape from slavery, as well as provide them with shelter, food, and moral support.

Since the overall concept of slavery is based on discrimination on racial grounds, it can be expected that enslaved people and former slaves might experience identity crises because of the increased awareness of their racial identity. Sam Durrant warns of the dangers of what he calls "racial memory": "While cultural memory can be assimilated into the individual consciousness as a complement to the individual's sense of identity, racial memory threatens to destroy this sense of identity by dissolving the individual within a collective experience of negation" (2004: 80). As the institution of slavery implied the total destruction of the slaves' identities by depriving them of human rights, personal names, possessions, family, tradition, and cultural tradition, this inevitably led to the creation of a collectively traumatized community, whose identity development was impeded by racist discrimination.

6.2.4 Narratological perspective

When narratological perspective is taken into consideration, it is relevant to analyze the narrative techniques and literary devices that Morrison employs in the novel, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the ways in which narration reflects the main themes of the novel and presents the obstacles, challenges, and traumatic experiences that characters face on their journeys toward self-discovery. Characters face adverse historical circumstances that provoke them to make some tough decisions, which makes this story very dramatic and overwhelming. Carole Boyce Davies comments on the demanding job of writing such a compelling novel: "Tensions, then, exist around struggles to tell a difficult story; to place on record those things silenced or repressed, such as problematical responses to motherhood; to speak the "unspeakable"" (1994: 147). Speaking about a topic that had been avoided for a long time, about the people who had been marginalized and oppressed, and about taboo topics that had been almost as shocking in the 1870s as they are now, Morrison had to include symbolism, grotesque, and even fantastic elements to depict this incredible tale. Additionally, Dwight A. McBride focuses on the historical context of slavery that the overall black community shared by saying: "Sethe's story implies the impossibility of telling an individual tale. The slave body is both singular and collective" (2007: 170). By telling Sethe's tale, Morrison tells the story of the entire nation and gives voice to the ones who were denied the right to speak.

Morrison does not present the plot chronologically, but she does it "in a dislocated temporal scheme" (Peach 1995: 16). Readers discover the past events from characters' stories, but these stories are often incomplete, as characters withhold pieces of information that they do not wish to be disclosed. Jean Wyatt believes that the reason why Morrison presents the event in a non-chronological order is that she wants to depict the traumatized world of the characters: "Abandoning the largely chronological ordering and realist discourse of her early novels, Morrison introduces disruptions of syntax and grammar that reflect the troubled psychic worlds of the ex-slaves who are her characters" (2017: 19). Unreliable and fragmented narration of the past mirrors the traumatized interior world of the characters who, when finally given the voice, find themselves unable to tell the truthful version of events as the atrocities they have been through still haunt them. As Jill Matus insightfully concludes: "What the trauma of slavery has done is to disturb linearity and chronology. Time itself is haunted, and narrative denies history, which is an ordering of time" (1998: 111). Telling such a horrifying story requires reliving the terrifying moments, which is why characters might resort to omissions,

modifications, and even embellishments of elements of stories. However, Sam Durrant suggests that telling the story is the only way to lead to recovery from traumatic events: "The basic impulse to narrate the past would suggest that postcolonial narrative seeks to perform some kind of therapy, even in the absence of retrieving a history. In this regard, the aim of postcolonial narrative would at first sight appear to be similar to that of psychoanalysis" (2004: 8). *Beloved* can be described as a postcolonial narrative, as characters' sharing of their stories and Morrison's sharing of the story of slavery may have healing purposes, both for the characters in the novel and the overall black race, as the novel suggests that only by coming to terms with the past it is possible to have a chance at a happy and peaceful future.

Rafael Pérez-Torres sheds light on Morrison's usage of different points of view and various perspectives in the portrayal of events: "Numerous voices retell the same event, each from different perspectives, none taking precedence over the others" (1997: 106). In this way, Morrison allows us to perceive each character's view on events but also gain a complete understanding of what happened; therefore, Paul D and Sethe tell their version of the escape from Sweet Home; Denver and Sethe share different stories about Denver's birth; Sethe, Schoolteacher and the newspaper that reported the incident all see the murder of Beloved differently. Additionally, by portraying various viewpoints, Morrison emphasizes that each perspective is equally important, especially when traumatic events are taken into consideration and when the opportunity to speak up is given to marginalized and oppressed groups.

It is noteworthy to emphasize that Morrison also insists on readers' participation in this novel. Although some morally questionable events are discussed, the novel does not impose moral judgment but allows readers to interpret the characters' actions for themselves.

In order to depict the atrocities of slavery in great detail, Morrison utilizes grotesque elements which vividly paint the picture of the physical and psychological abuse the slaves endured. Susan Corey mentions that aspects of the grotesque are used to describe the bodies of formerly enslaved people: "These physical deformities, all marks of the grotesque, serve to heighten the readers' consciousness of the monstrous character of slavery written on the bodies of its victims" (2000: 36). In this way, the novel provides accurate descriptions of the tree on Sethe's back, the tree representing the scars that resulted from lynching; the scar on Beloved's neck that is reminiscent of the place where Sethe used a handsaw to kill her daughter; the portrayal of the scene when Schoolteacher's nephews violate Sethe and steal her milk; Sethe's mother's scars that would make her recognizable to her child; and, Sethe's agreeing on seven minutes of sex for the inscription on her daughter's grave. Pérez-Torres makes an analogy between the character's physical suffering and their identities: "The bodies of these characters become the texts on which their identity is written" (1997: 98). The characters are marked by the scars on their bodies, as they serve as constant reminders of painful past events, even long after slavery is abolished and wounds have healed. They testify to the humiliation the enslaved people had to endure and the immense traumas that stemmed from them. On the other hand, Barbara Hill Rigney offers a different interpretation: "The marks are hieroglyphs, clues to a culture and a history more than to individual personality" (1991: 39). Apart from defining the characters' personalities and threatening their identity development, the scars on the enslaved people's and former slaves' bodies present the evidence of a white supremacist tradition and an extremely cruel legacy of slavery.

Susan Corey considers the celebration that Sethe and Baby Suggs held to express their joy over Sethe's and her children's successful escape from Sweet Home to be an element of grotesque for the following reasons: "Externally, it is an event of communal sharing and togetherness, marred by its opposite – a scene of horror and bloody child murder. Internally, it evokes a sense of the sacred and the transcendent, yet arouses anger and alienation, bringing discord and division to the community" (2000: 42). It is essential to highlight that Baby Suggs and Sethe simply wished to set up a party and celebrate the victory of black people over white

slaveowners, wishing for the overall black community to share their happiness with them and treat them with a generous feast as the members of the black community were the ones who assisted Sethe and made it possible for her and her children to escape. However, the black community sees this celebration as pretentious and consequently does not warn Sethe of the arrival of the Schoolteacher. These actions mirror the moral failure of the black community.

In addition to powerful and grotesque images, Morrison also infuses the house where Sethe lives with symbolic meaning. Jean Wyatt comments on the significance of the house number: "Here a number functions as the subject of a sentence and we enter a narrative world where that same number (124) is a subject complete with strong emotions, agency, and the capacity to effect change in its world" (2017: 9). Morrison denotes that "124 was spiteful" (2005: 3), "loud" (2005: 199), and "quiet" (2005: 281), personifying the house and attributing the feelings of its residents to the house itself. The house at 124 Bluestone Road is depicted as a haunted house inhabited by a ghost. However, while the spirit of Beloved is believed to be occupying the premises, it is also evident that the house is possessed by the ghosts of the past, as the characters living in it seem unable to let go of the past and focus on the present moment. Perhaps Morrison emphasizes the house address because she wants to highlight the importance of possessing the house for the formerly enslaved people. When they lived on slave plantations, they did not have any addresses; they did not have a house that they could consider their own. Therefore, Sethe's newly developed awareness of what it really means to possess something perhaps stems from the realization that the house now belongs to her family, just like the children she gave birth to now belong to her. As illustrated in the novel, Sethe's recently awakened awareness of her personal possessions drives her to commit what most of the characters in the novel consider to be an unforgivable crime.

Additionally, it is relevant to mention the numerical symbolism that is prominent in *Beloved*. It can be argued that house number "124" signifies Sethe's children who survived the Schoolteacher's arrival and Sethe's attempt to murder them (as Beloved was Sethe's third child, the number three is omitted). Furthermore, Linda Wagner-Martin sheds light on the time that Sethe spent with all her children in freedom and bliss: "During the 28 days of the family's shared happiness, a female marker that suggests the menstrual cycle and also foreshadows the 28 parts into which *Beloved* is structurally divided, Sethe and Baby Suggs – in spite of Halle's absence – know joy" (2015: 70). Wagner-Martin suggests that the twenty-eight days that Sethe and Baby Suggs spend together in the house with the children, celebrating the successful escape, symbolize the menstrual cycle that is of significant importance for the woman's ability to bring children into the world. This numerical significance perhaps draws attention to motherhood as one of the defining aspects of Sethe's personality.

Apart from numerical symbolism, the personal names of both people and houses reveal metaphorical meanings. When it comes to the name of the slave plantation where Sethe, Halle, and Paul D worked, Danielle Russel explains adequately: "The name of the slavehold signals the perversion of the natural order that is slavery; the attempt to camouflage the reality behind the "homey" name is futile" (2006: 126). Although the plantation was named Sweet Home, it was neither a sweet experience nor a home for the enslaved people living there. As much as Mr. Garner wanted to believe that he provided fair conditions for his slaves, Mr. Garner's slaves discovered the true nature of the brutality of slavery after his death. In relation to personal names, Cynthia Lyles-Scott elaborates on how the slaveowners' naming of their slaves threatens an essential aspect of the slaves' identities by analyzing the names of brothers Paul A, Paul D, and Paul F: "By being given the same first name, with only an alphabetical character to distinguish them, the Pauls are effectively dispossessed of their individuality and their own distinctive claim to an identity" (2009: 197). By naming his slaves in the same way with only a slight difference, the slaveowner demonstrates that he only cares about making a difference among them. The personal names in this way, serve to label the enslaved people; they do not

establish any familial connection and therefore do not carry any ancestral significance, which deprives slaves of an important feature when it comes to their self-definition. Another example of slavery's impact on slaves' personal names is Baby Suggs' name. When Mr. Garner kindly advises her that she should call herself "Jenny" as is written on the ownership claim he received from her previous master, Baby Suggs vehemently denies this name, explaining that she had never heard anyone calling her "Jenny", and that "Baby" is her name as her husband used to call her like that, while Suggs was his name, and she wanted her name to be associated with him.

Another personal name from the novel that carries symbolic significance and can be interpreted in numerous ways is Beloved. Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock points to a plethora of its interpretations: "Everything in *Beloved*, from title to last word, circles around the name, the ways in which the word "beloved" connotes both the most intense intimacy and communal gatherings, the celebration of new life together and the sundering of bonds by death" (2009: 74). When Sethe heard the words "dearly beloved" at the funeral of her daughter, she decided that she wished these words to be carved on the inscription of her grave. It seems that this phrase, commonly used at the beginning of a wedding or a funeral to address the people attending, is unfamiliar to Sethe. Given that Sethe was enslaved since she was born until she ran away from Sweet Home, it is highly probable that she had never attended a wedding or funeral before. Daniel Erickson makes a vital remark when he emphasizes that the name Beloved "refers to and addresses both the mourned and mourners" (2009: 119), as priests or other people officiating the wedding or funeral ceremonies use this word to welcome the attendees, but in the novel, the word also refers to the baby being mourned. Erickson further continues: "The word itself thus signifies the bridging of the gap between the novels' readers and slavery, between a community of mourners and the mourned themselves" (119: 2009). Because of the word's dual meaning in the novel, it can be said that the word "beloved" establishes a connection between those who ponder about slavery and those who witnessed this traumatic experience, or more specifically, between those who grieve over the former existence of the institution of slavery and those who lived through it.

Morrison further complicates the interpretation of Beloved's name when a girl appears at Sethe's doorstep, claiming her name is Beloved. Since the girl's named Beloved can be understood to represent the embodiment of Sethe's dead daughter, or interpreted to signify the painful history of slavery, or simply represent a runaway girl who managed to escape from captivity, the word "beloved" can be associated with several contrasting meanings.

Speaking of the character of Beloved, Morrison employs elements of magical realism in its creation. Magical realism refers to the mixture of supernatural elements with reality; characters usually accept these magical elements as part of ordinary life. The first instance of magical realism is encountered at the novel's very beginning – in the form of the ghost that haunts the house at Bluestone Road 124 and its residents. The inhabitants of the house believe that this is the ghost of Sethe's murdered daughter, and Daniel Erickson implies that the appearance of the ghost is infused with deeper meaning: "Thus, while the ghost exists as an extended entity in the novel's world, it still functions as a metaphorical presentation of the emotional intensity of the household. Indeed, Paul D *feels* the emotion as the very substance of the ghost" (2009: 18). Understood in this way, it seems that both the house and the ghost reveal the inner feelings of the residents in the house; Sethe believes that the ghost is sad, while Denver insists that the ghost is "lonely and rebuked" (Morrison 2005: 16). While Sethe definitely feels miserable about murdering her daughter, we can also conclude that Denver would feel very lonely as she was alienated from the community, her peers, and her family, as the only people she was spending time with were her mother and the ghost. Herbert William Rice draws attention to the importance of the spirit: "This ghost is no shadowy presence; it is a daily part of the household, a daily threat to living" (1996: 114). The ghost becomes an

integral part of Sethe and Denver's life, but its presence is very unhealthy and detrimental to both of them for many reasons. First, the ghost kept reminding them of the past traumas they have suffered through; next, the presence of the ghost in the house made them socially isolated from the community and other family members; and finally, they got used to it, to the extent that Denver felt unbearably lonely when Paul D seemingly scared away the ghost.

The arrival of Beloved, whom the characters believe to represent Sethe's deceased daughter, is another example of magical realism in the novel. While there are many interpretations of Beloved's presence, Erickson suggests that: "The ghost's major function is to metaphorically represent the past and the way that the traces of the past persist in the present" (2009: 16). When Beloved appears with considerable knowledge about the past, she forces Sethe to come to terms with her actions and accept the accountability for the murder of her daughter. Beloved also illustrates the consequences of allowing past actions to interfere with the present moment, as Sethe's health and psyche start deteriorating after she starts dwelling on the past too much and letting it take over her current life.

When conversing about the reasons for the creation of Beloved's character, Zhu Ying concludes: "The purpose of making Beloved (the character) real is making history possible, making memory real and forgetting possible" (2006: 36). It can be said that the purpose of Beloved is twofold: to remind characters of the painful events from the past, but also to help them come to terms with them, heal, and move on with their lives. Apart from making the characters relive the history, Audrey L. Vinson suggests that magical elements have another purpose in the novel: "Fanciful or fantastic representations lift her characters out of normal ranges and validate the "tests" which they undergo in proving who they are" (1985: 8). The ghost and the subsequent appearance of Beloved challenge Sethe and Denver's strength, their ability to tackle memories of past events and mistakes, and their willingness to leave the past behind and focus on the future. These magical elements illustrate the role of the past and its significant impact on one's identity construction.

Closely related to magical realism is the usage of apotropaic components that Kathleen Marks recognizes in Morrison's fiction: "The apotropaic, then, are those gestures aimed at warding off, or resisting, a danger, a threat, or an imperative. More exactly, apotropaic gestures anticipate, mirror, and put into effect that which they seek to avoid: one does what one finds horrible so as to mitigate its horror" (2002: 2). Sethe displays an apotropaic action when she decides to murder her children, trying to ameliorate what she perceives to be a hopeless situation for her family. Marks further adds that: "Sethe becomes an image of the apotropaic: the apotropaic as a defense against past violation" (2002: 34). Sethe embellishes instances of physical abuse as an unconscious attempt of a defense mechanism; she describes her scars as a chokecherry tree; when she talks about the Schoolteacher's nephews' violation, she only mentions that they stole her milk, she avoids talking about the whipping that evidently happened. Sethe suppresses the memories that she considers too painful to talk about. This also accounts for the omission of some plot elements, which are present in all of Morrison's novels analyzed thus far. Laurie Vickroy notes that this narrative strategy serves to denote the pain of traumatic events: "Morrison avoids standard chronology and linear storytelling, seeking out the paths of elicited survivor memories that are characterized by the struggle to both remember and forget. Silence is an especially important manifestation of repression, secrecy, and loss" (2002: 179). Sethe remains silent about infanticide; she does not discuss it with either Paul D or Denver. As confident as she is that she did what was suitable for her daughter, Sethe does not wish to speak of it, even though she is aware that the black community knows about the incident.

In order to depict the inextricable connection between past and present, in both the individual story of Sethe and the collective story of slavery, Morrison invents the word "rememory", the word that Sethe uses in the novel: "I used to think it was my rememory. You

know. Some things you forget. Other things you never do" (Morrison 2005: 43). Sethe uses the word "rememory" as both a noun and a verb, to express the impossibility to separate the past from the present. Zhu Ying explains the symbolic meaning of the word: "Thus, rememory functions as a metaphor for imagining individual past and transforming it into a higher status of collective consciousness appropriate to the historical novel's claim in representing personalized and cultural histories" (2006: 26). By documenting Sethe's story, Morrison emphasizes the importance of remembering and recovering past traumatic experiences that have been suppressed, as acknowledging the past events, as unpleasant as they were, is a necessary step toward healing and growth. Ying emphasizes that Morrison coined this word "to fight against disremembering history and episodic amnesia" (2006: 26), perhaps implying that the United States of America has to own up to its historic mistakes so that the truthful version of the past can be preserved, and so that the future generations can learn from it.

When it comes to the character of Beloved, it can be easily noticed that she speaks differently from other characters; she speaks what Lisa Williams terms the "traumatized language" (2012: 77). Beloved's traumatized language represents the fragmented narrative that is filled with gaps and silences, aimed to signify the extent of the trauma she experienced. Caroline A. Brown believes that Beloved's traumatized language might have a deeper meaning: "*Beloved*'s fractured narrative encapsulates both a historiography of American racial terror and the postmodern praxis that attempts to retrieve it" (2012: 30). Beloved's inability to verbalize her traumatic experiences properly can be applied to the overall history of slavery, as the racial history of enslaved people can also be interpreted as being filled with absences and silences.

Another point worthy of critical attention regarding the narratological perspective is the polyphony of Sethe, Denver, and Beloved's voices, which Morrison documents using a stream-of-consciousness technique that presents their thoughts and feelings. Laurie Vickroy explores the importance of this narrative segment: "Dialogism thus has three purposes in *Beloved*: to enable testimony, to juxtapose different perspectives, and to confront the viewer or reader with the complexities of traumatic experience and its interpretation" (2002: 184). Sethe, Denver, and Beloved's monologues allow them to speak about everything they were previously silent about: Sethe finally provides justifications for infanticide and reminiscences about her mother's death, Denver admits to feeling afraid of her mother and secretly hopes that her father would come back someday, and Beloved's fragmented monologue mentions dead bodies she was surrounded by, as well as hunger, death, and sickness. Mieke Bal believes that these monologues point to one of the most devastating consequences of slavery: "The fragmentation and fusion that inhibit the formation of subjectivity are used to represent the difficulty of remembering a traumatic past – that of slavery, in turn represented in the most painful of its experiences, the impossibility of mother-child relationships under such conditions" (2017: 16). Sethe, Denver, and Beloved's monologues reveal the most significant obstacles on their roads to self-discovery, and each one of them is related to traumatized mother-daughter relationships. Although Sethe had a troubled relationship with her mother because she was born into slavery and her mother was murdered due to an attempted escape, Sethe hoped and wished that she would be given an opportunity to be a better mother to her own children. However, the perpetuating historical circumstances into which Sethe was born forced her to make some difficult parental decisions that strained the relationship between her and her children.

The ending of the novel is filled with symbolic significance. Morrison claims: "It was not a story to pass on" (Morrison 2005: 324), and then swiftly changes the tense of the verb and says: "This is not a story to pass on" (Morrison 2005: 324). Lucia Villares analyzes the change of tenses from past to present: "The change from the past tense 'was' to the present tense 'is' links the events of the past (mid-nineteenth century) to the present (late twentieth century), emphasizing the resilience of traumatic memory" (2011: 61). The repetition of the sentence with a slight difference implies that the story about Beloved was simultaneously

unspeakable and in great need of being spoken about. As observed by Claudine Raynaud, “The story had to be told and at the same time could not be passed on to younger generations” (2007: 45). The same can be said about the story about black people in the period of slavery; as painful, difficult, and retraumatizing it is to speak about it, it is necessary to do so, in order not to have the trauma of slavery repeated, overlooked, or forgotten. Furthermore, a conclusion can be drawn that the change of tenses indicates the shift in responsibility from the community to the readers, that it is now the readers’ task to keep the memory of slavery alive.

When it comes to the very last words in the novel, Zhu Ying addresses its meaning and purpose: “Together the author and the reader sing ‘Beloved’, which is the closing paragraph and word of the novel, acknowledging and mourning for whatever she represents” (2006: 73). Ying suggests that the characters come to terms with and grieve over everything that Beloved may stand for, whether it is seen as the embodiment of Sethe’s deceased daughter, a random girl who was brutally treated by a slaveowner, a metaphor for the history of slavery, a metaphor for the people who died during the Middle Passage, or the reminder that history should not be forgotten. Robert Samuels adds to the discussion by saying: “Within in postmodern structure, I would like to read the ending of the novel as an extended address that is made to all of America” (2001: 132). Perhaps Morrison wishes to emphasize the importance of remembering the nation’s history, as a reminder of previous traumatic experiences that contributed to shaping the collective national identity.

Commenting on the last word of the novel, Laurie Vickroy expresses her view: “She is a sad, disturbing presence, not sentimentalized, because at times she is destructive, creepy, the victim who returns to be claimed, but eventually must be driven away because such loss cannot be compensated for, only mourned” (2002: 191). Vickroy notices that whatever Beloved represents tends to return to haunt and disturb the present moment, but it is necessary to chase it away, as its continuing presence cannot bring any benefits for the future.

6.2.5 Literary trauma studies and psychoanalytical perspective

Beloved examines the psychological impact of trauma on the identity development of both individuals and the overall black community. The novel explores the causes of trauma in the historical context of slavery, such as physical and psychological abuse, sexual exploitation, racial discrimination, and economic oppression. Additionally, it analyzes the characters' different coping mechanisms and the steps toward recovery from traumatic experiences.

Furthermore, the novel investigates the necessity of reliving past traumatic events to progress in the self-individuation process. Pin-chia Feng comments succinctly on the topic: “An awareness of one’s history is the first step toward understanding one’s self. Yet no one who travels back to the traumatic past can remain intact, both physically and mentally” (1998: 23). As illustrated by the characters in the novel, it is excruciatingly painful to deal with traumas such as infanticide, broken family ties, and various forms of abuse and dehumanization, but retraumatization, i.e., reliving the past traumatic experience helps them in coming to terms with traumas and overcoming them.

The most conspicuous example of a traumatic experience in *Beloved* is Sethe’s murder of her daughter. Lucia Villares draws attention to how Morrison presents this traumatic event: “Indeed, the whole novel is built around a traumatic scene that escapes from memory and from narration; an event that is never fully or completely described, but has to be constructed through fragments in the mind of the reader” (2011: 60). The trauma of infanticide causes identity crises of several characters in the novel; identity crises are manifested in Baby Suggs’s decision to give up on her preaching activities and communal gatherings, Howard and Burglar’s escape from home, Denver’s deafness after one of her peers asks her about the crime her mother

committed, and Sethe's isolation from the black community and imagination of the presence of the angry ghost. Sethe does not speak of the infanticide to anyone until Paul D confronts her about it; for Sethe, the act of murdering her daughter out of love is unspeakable. Rossitsa Terzieva-Artemis presents the effects of such an intensely traumatic event: "She is desperately trying to put up with the trauma of the infanticide, a trauma in which she is both a subject and an object" (2010: 193). It can be argued that Sethe was the one who imposed trauma on both herself and her family members, as she was the one who chose to murder her daughter rather than have her return to slavery. However, it is also worth emphasizing that Sethe is a victim of the crime she committed, as she was forced and provoked by complex historical and social circumstances, namely, the brutal institution of slavery and lack of communal support.

In the aftermath of the traumatic event, Sethe suffers from what Erickson terms "posttraumatic stress syndrome" (2009: 26), which is reflected in her inability to forgive herself for what she did and move forward with her life. Erickson believes that one of the consequences of Sethe's posttraumatic stress syndrome is her imagination that there is a ghost in the house: "Her "ghosts" can be read as hallucinations brought about by her traumatized state of mind, reifications of the memories that still "haunt" her thoughts" (2009: 28). Given the scope and intensity of the trauma that Sethe experienced, Erickson may have provided a probable explanation for the ghost's presence. However, the novel suggests that Denver, Baby Suggs, and Paul D all claim to have felt the ghost's occupancy of the house, so whether the ghost was just a hallucination caused by severe traumas or the manifestation of supernatural forces remains unanswered. Another consequence of Sethe's posttraumatic stress syndrome is the feeling of inconsolable grief that does not seem to diminish. Sigmund Freud defines this overwhelming feeling of grief: "Grief is a prototype and perfect example of an effective fixation upon something that is past, and, like the neurosis, it also involves a state of complete alienation from the present and the future" (1943: 244). With the arrival of Beloved to the house at Bluestone Road 124, Sethe gives in to the mourning and appears to be possessed by the past, which encourages her to quit her job, neglect Denver, and focus solely on her time with Beloved while she only discusses the history, without thinking about the present moment or the future.

Moreover, Morrison demonstrates that traumas affect characters differently and that they do not respond to traumatic events in the same way. While Baby Suggs decides to give up on life, Halle chooses to run away without an explanation, in the same way that his sons do when they witness the enormous traumatic experience. On the other hand, Sethe displays the resilience and strength of her character in the face of trauma when she still lives her life the best way she can, which includes going to work, providing financial means, and taking care of her family. However, it seems that all of these characters have something in common regarding verbal expressions of traumas – they remain silent about them. Philip Page broadly supports this claim: "For the characters in *Beloved*, the past has been so painful, the fragmentations of self and community have been so debilitating, that the task of making those memories real by putting them into words is almost impossible" (1995: 152). Because of the harrowing experiences that they have been through, characters choose not to speak of them; Sethe never talks about infanticide, not even to her family members, while Paul D says that he locked all of his painful memories and emotions in a tobacco tin in his chest. As much as the characters try to suppress all the negative traumatic experiences, they still appear unable to move forward with their lives. Laurie Vickroy explains the power of trauma in great detail: "Despite the human capacity to survive and adapt, traumatic experiences can alter people's psychological, biological, and social equilibrium to such a degree that the memory of one particular event comes to taint all other experiences, spoiling appreciation of the present" (2002: 11). The impact of trauma does not allow characters to enjoy the present moment and look forward to the future as they constantly reminisce about past events; the trauma of infanticide exerts its power on all the residents of the house at Bluestone Road 124; Baby Suggs does not see any

reason to continue living which is why she gives in to death; Denver does not go to school and interact with her peers, and consequently becomes socially awkward and introverted; while Sethe spends her time thinking about her past actions, unable to forgive herself.

When it comes to the exploration of trauma consequences, Laurie Vickroy makes an important observation: "Transference of traumatic responses can continue for generations" (2002: 19), emphasizing the claim that "[…] children inherit patterns of traumatic response" (2002: 19). Children look up to their parents and other adults who surround them while they are growing up and they adopt their patterns of behavior. Similarly, children observe how their parents tackle, accept, and respond to traumatic events, and they inherently imitate their modes of behavior. This is primarily illustrated in *Beloved* when Sethe's children are taken into consideration. Following their father's footsteps, Howard and Burglar run away from home and their family without an explanation or notice. On the other hand, Denver looks up to her mother and becomes as socially ostracized and obsessed with past events as her mother is. Her children's reactions to the trauma they witnessed – the infanticide – could be analyzed as an exemplification of Sethe's poor parenting skills. Although it is undeniable that Sethe loves her children dearly and would go to great lengths to protect them and keep them safe, she neglects that she, perhaps subconsciously, passes down the traumas she experienced to her children.

However, when it comes to the criticism of slave mothers, Greg Forter makes a relevant comment: "The novel in this way begins to trace out an exceedingly complex psychosocial scenario. It suggests that slavery works in part by coercing black women into being mothers (i.e., raping and impregnating them) while blocking their efforts to "realize" a mother's affection" (2014: 79). Slavery also inflicts the trauma of motherhood on slave mothers, as women are forced to become mothers and give birth to children but they are denied the right to tend to their children, nurture them, and enjoy the benefits of motherhood. In this way, it seems wrong to criticize slave mothers for their choices, as they were not asked whether they wanted to become mothers in the first place. While Sethe did want to have a family with Halle, the circumstances they lived in changed, but just because their slave master changed does not mean that Sethe was able to stop caring about her children and stop wishing to protect them.

Apart from experiencing trauma individually, the novel depicts the collectively experienced trauma – the trauma of slavery. As noted by Robert Samuels: "[…] slavery is the repressed trauma of American history […]" (2001: 129). In addition to physical and psychological abuse and humiliating and dehumanizing forms of oppression during the period of slavery, the institution of slavery also left lingering consequences for the former slaves. Judith Herman describes the distinctive features of the trauma of slavery: "Prolonged, repeated trauma, by contrast, occurs only in circumstances of captivity. When the victim is free to escape, she will not be abused a second time; repeated trauma occurs only when the victim is a prisoner, unable to flee, and under the control of the perpetrator" (1992: 74). Slavery accounted for the ongoing infliction of confinement, abuse, and emotional distress, which traumatized every aspect of slaves' lives. Additionally, slavery harmed the emotional, social, familial, communal, and cultural elements of slaves' personalities by not allowing them to form friendships, start families, or celebrate the cultural heritage of their ancestors. Herman further comments on the consequences of slavery that persisted even after the slaves were granted freedom: "Even after release from captivity, the victim cannot assume her former identity. Whatever new identity she develops in freedom must include the memory of her enslaved self" (1992: 93). The past keeps reentering the formerly enslaved people's lives; therefore, Sethe keeps being reminded of the past events, whether it is in the form of the ghost, the arrival of Paul D who worked on the same plantation as she did, or the girl who Sethe imagines to be the embodiment of her dead daughter. These physical reminders of the difficulties she endured, together with her "rememory" do not allow Sethe to move forward and leave the past behind. Lucia Villares focuses her attention on the meaning of "rememory" by saying: "[…] Morrison

is developing a concept of memory that is broader than the notion of an intimate, individual, mental act of recall. Rememory is something that reaches beyond personal and voluntary memory; it has a materiality that one cannot avoid encountering" (2011: 62). Rememory refers to much more than a simple act of remembering; it includes reminiscing about events that one would rather not remember. Rememory is not willful, and consequently, it keeps reminding Sethe of traumas that impede her identity development to a great extent.

When discussing the psychological enslavement of the characters that persist long after the institution of slavery is abolished, it is noteworthy to emphasize that the characters themselves are partially responsible for the perpetuation of mental enslavement. Steven V. Daniels reveals essential pieces of information regarding this: "Both Sethe and Paul D "got to choose," and in their subsequent lives they are haunted by the choices they made. But in their suffering, their acceptance of responsibility for their opposing choices, lies the measure of their dignity" (2009: 6). As limited and complex as their choices were, the fact remains that enslaved people did have options to choose from. However, the impression lingers that the repercussions of their decisions often seemed more harmful, and sometimes even more tragic, than the alternative options that enslaved people were presented with. For instance, Sethe's mother attempted to escape, and the punishment for such an act was hanging; another consequence of her decision was that Sethe lived with the memory of her hanged mother and the realization that her mother was willing to run away and leave her daughter behind. Additionally, Sethe decided to commit infanticide rather than have her daughter return to slavery; as a result, she tore her family apart by provoking her sons to leave the house and her remaining daughter to live in fear of her mother. Baby Suggs also makes a choice when she abandons the preaching activities and gives up on life. On a positive note, after witnessing Sethe and Beloved's unhealthy obsession with each other and their complete disregard for the world outside of the house at Bluestone Road 124, Denver decides to take control of her life, find a job, and pursue education, in an attempt to create a better future for herself.

Another form of trauma that derives from the trauma of slavery is the cultural trauma that black people experience. By being separated from their homeland and their ancestors and not establishing an intimate and permanent relationship with their families, black people are deprived of their native language, cultural heritage, and traditional values and beliefs. Robert Samuels addresses the cultural amnesia among the black population: "By claiming that slavery represents the repressed trauma of American culture, I am positing that there is such thing as a national unconscious" (2001: 121). Since black people were forcibly integrated into American society and became an intrinsic part of the social and cultural milieu of the United States, the loss of black people's traditions and cultural features should be blamed on white supremacy and the institution of slavery. However, observed from a broader perspective, this cultural loss threatens the social, cultural, religious, and national diversity that the United States of America feels immensely proud of.

When discussing the scope and intensity of traumatic experiences that characters go through, it is significant to emphasize that characters do not always have firsthand experience of trauma, but they still suffer from its consequences. In the novel, Denver is the victim of the transgenerational trauma of slavery. Speaking of the impact of transgenerational trauma, Marianne Hirsch employs the term "postmemory": "Postmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (1997: 14). Hirsch explains that she initially developed this concept in the discussion of Holocaust survivors' children, but that the concept also relates to subsequent generations of those who experienced any kind of collective trauma. In *Beloved*, Denver experiences postmemory as she is severely impacted by the trauma of slavery even though she was born after her mother escaped from bondage. Still, Denver lives

alone with her mother, who is deeply traumatized by her past experiences. Additionally, her father and brothers were absent from her life, as they could not deal with the devastating consequences of slavery and decided to run away rather than stay with the remaining family members. Apart from that, Denver lives in a black community whose members are also traumatized by slavery. Hirsch elaborates on the formidable impact of postmemory: "Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation" (1997: 22). Postmemory does not relate to a particular event that occurred to an individual and that an individual can remember, thus making it even more difficult for victims to recover from transgenerational traumas, as they are not able to remember it, verbalize it, or come to terms with it.

When it comes to the manifestation of trauma in the novel itself, Morrison introduces Beloved as the physical embodiment of trauma. Lucia Villares pinpoints that the purpose of presenting the physical representation of trauma is to force people to address what is considered to be unspeakable: "By trying to express what is being forgotten and repressed as 'not there,' Morrison gives physical and material existence to aspects of the past that have been obliterated from public memory" (2011: 59). Beloved represents the trauma of the past, and by making a physical appearance, she forces the characters to deal with both the collective trauma of slavery and their individual traumas that resulted from slavery. Carol E. Henderson adds to the discussion by saying: "Morrison is keen in fleshing out the dynamics of human relationships, demonstrating that some wounds cannot heal unless they are *seen*, manifested in the flesh, so that one's spiritual essence can be reconnected with its host's self" (2010: 148). The novel demonstrates that confronting one's past allows characters to make progress in their healing process; Sethe, Denver, and Paul D all face their inner traumas when Beloved appears; they realize they cannot be quiet about their traumas and they need to speak of them and deal with them. Therefore, Beloved opens Paul D's tobacco tin that keeps his feelings and memories, forcing him to tackle all the painful moments from his past. Beloved also persuades Sethe to converse about all the circumstances, reasons, and justifications regarding the infanticide, while Denver finally admits how she feels about her mother and comes to the realization that she should break free from the traumatic environment she lived in and start living her life differently.

Additionally, the character of Beloved draws attention to the collective traumatic experience of slavery. Herbert William Rice expounds on the meaning of Beloved's character concerning trauma: "With a ghost that is inescapable, she reminds us once again of the brutal past that slumbers in the collective memory of our national consciousness. It is only through acknowledging the past that each of us can escape the ghost" (1996: 116). Interpreted metaphorically, Beloved represents the trauma of slavery that should retraumatize both black and white people. Beloved's character reawakens the negative feelings associated with slavery in Sethe and Paul D, and perhaps even the overall black community living in Cincinnati when they hear of its haunting presence. On the other hand, the character of Beloved, as the bearer of the symbolic meaning of slavery, sends a message to the reader of the novel, drawing their attention to the disturbing aspect of the American past that should not be forgotten. Speaking of the collective traumatic experience of slavery, Michelle Balaev asserts: "In addition, the character of Beloved is a traumatized protagonist because she symbolically represents the collective experience of Africans enduring the "Middle Passage" journey across the Atlantic from Africa to the Americas" (2012: 21). The Middle Passage was an important part of the Atlantic slave trade, and it refers to the transatlantic journey when millions of enslaved Africans were transported. As Beloved, in her monologue, mentions being crouched among dead bodies, remembers being thirsty and hungry, reminisces about sickness and death, and "men without skin" (Morrison 2005: 249), it can be assumed that Beloved speaks of the brutal conditions on

the slave ship. This assumption is additionally supported by Morrison's dedication of the novel to "Sixty Million and more" (Morrison 2005), which is the estimated number of black people who died during the Atlantic slave trade from disease, starvation, or suicide.

In his analysis of the meaning of Beloved, Petar Ramadanovic offers a different perspective: "What is haunting in *Beloved* is, therefore, not slavery, as the novel's readers usually maintain, but race, where we should understand race as that thing – that terrifying thing – that defines what America is" (2001: 136). If we were to investigate the causal relationship between race and slavery, it would be evident that race is the cause, and slavery is the effect. Slavery is based on racial discrimination, on the belief of white slaveowners that they are entitled to enslave, oppress, and dehumanize other people on racial grounds. Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that collective racial trauma is the one that interferes with black people's identity development and that Beloved's character presents the effects of such a trauma.

Regarding the narrative representation of trauma in *Beloved*, Morrison uses omission, fragmentation, narrating from differing points of view, and the polyphony of characters' stories to reflect the impact of traumatic experiences. Michelle Balaev notices that many authors use narrative dissociation when discussing traumas and lists the main characteristics of this narrative strategy: "Strategies of expressing dissociation include the disjunction of time through the use of repetition and negation; imagistic scenes of violence that lack emotional description; syntactical subversion and rearrangement; atemporality; and a doubled consciousness or point of view" (2012: xvi). Morrison demonstrates most of these in the novel; *Beloved* does not present the plot chronologically and includes various interpretations of a single event depicting different characters' perspectives on the topic. Apart from these, characters often choose to conceal the truth and not verbalize what they consider to be unspeakable, as Balaev observes: "In this way, silence is a narrative strategy, rather than evidence for an epistemological void created by the experience of trauma" (2012: 23). Tessa Roynon draws attention to Beloved's monologue: "Beloved's monologue is the strangest: Morrison eschews punctuation, using only spaces to break up clauses" (2013: 53). Beloved's fragmented narration reflects both the individual trauma of infanticide and the communal trauma of black slaves during and after the Middle Passage. In this way, Morrison gives voice to the voiceless – Sethe's dead daughter Beloved and the deceased slaves on the slave ship.

Michelle Balaev draws attention to another significant aspect in describing traumatic experiences: "In fictional portrayals of trauma, the contextual factors of experience and remembering, particularly place and landscape, are meaning-making sites that portray the wide-ranging signification of emotional suffering" (2012: xv). In *Beloved*, certain places have paramount importance for characters as these places remind them of their traumatic experiences; for example, the Sweet Home plantation is simultaneously the place of great happiness for Sethe as it reminds her of the time when her family was complete, but it also reminds her of the physical and psychological abuse she suffered; Georgia makes Paul D think of the torturous conditions when he was a part of the chain gang; while the house at the Bluestone Road 124 reminds all its residents and visitors about the girl who was murdered right next to the house.

When it comes to the relevance of writing about traumas, Laurie Vickroy emphasizes that trauma narratives have an important responsibility: "Such reconstruction is also directed toward readers, engaging them in a meditation on individual distress, collective responsibilities, and communal healing in relation to trauma" (2002: 3). Apart from showing significant symptoms of traumas and different ways how characters deal with traumatic experiences, trauma narratives also have a teaching potential, as they attempt to educate readers on the importance of coming to terms with traumatic events and assisting their communities in overcoming of traumas.

By presenting various ways in which the characters try to recover from traumas, Morrison shows that there is no universal solution to trauma resolution. According to Trudier Harris, one of the main ideas that Morrison places particular emphasis on is that running away is not an effective solution: "The philosophy Morrison develops here is that the price of human existence cannot be placated through escapism – not that of Sethe killing her child, or of Baby Suggs willing herself to death, or any other form" (1993: 340). Any form of isolation or running away proved to be detrimental to characters, as they only temporarily delayed dealing with traumatic experiences; Sethe tried to confront the trauma of slavery by murdering her daughter, which only deepened her psychological trauma; Denver left the improvised school she was attending and stopped socializing with her peers attempting to avoid speaking about the traumatic event that dominated her family dynamics; Baby Suggs gave up on life and died eventually, leaving the black community and her family without the support that they terribly needed. As Philip Page suggests, it is necessary to verbalize the traumatic events and not run away from them: "Characters' social and psychological health is dependent on their ability to articulate the stories of their pasts or to invent stories that parallel or reconstruct their own lives, and sometimes on their ability to listen sympathetically" (1995: 178). The novel implies that it is extraordinarily difficult for characters to talk about past traumas as this often leads to rediscovery and reliving painful memories, but it is a necessary step toward recovery. Sethe and Paul D discuss life in Sweet Home, and while it is hard for Sethe to discover that Halle witnessed the schoolteacher's nephews' violation of her, it also provides an explanation for his absence. Sethe and Beloved's conversation about the circumstances of the infanticide shed light on Sethe's justification of the incident, which allows her to finally verbalize the leading cause of her traumatic psyche. K Zauditu-Selassie reiterates the significance of accepting the past: "Examining memory is an important place to begin, because it is only when characters regain a sense of the past that they can begin to imagine a future" (2009: 145). The ending of *Beloved* testifies to the importance of coming to terms with the past; Denver finally reintegrates into society and realizes that there is much more to life than dwelling on the past, while Sethe, although feeling miserable, finally has a chance to start living her life free from the ghosts of the past.

Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock points to another essential prerequisite for overcoming the traumatic event: "*Beloved* structures an encounter with lostness and introduces the necessity of mourning the lost as lost so as to open the possibility of a different future. Finally, what Sethe and Denver learn to do, at the end of it all, is to live. And it is a ghost that teaches them how" (2009: 89). Beloved opens old wounds for everyone: she forces Sethe to accept the responsibility for infanticide, encourages Denver to explore her personality traits and become independent from her mother, and compels Paul D to come to terms with his suppressed feelings and memories. However, this acceptance and the consequential relinquishment of the traumatic chains allows characters to finally start looking forward to the future, or, in Paul D's words "some kind of tomorrow" (Morrison 2005: 322).

Furthermore, Morrison emphasizes the role of the community in the process of recovering from trauma. The black community helps exorcise Beloved, embodying Sethe's traumatic past. However, the novel also illustrates that communal help is not enough and that it is necessary to confront and deal with the past both as individuals and the community to successfully overcome the traumatic experience. Still, even after an individual recovers from trauma, Judith Herman sheds light on the crucial next step on their road to self-discovery: "[…] the survivor faces the task of creating a future. She has mourned the old self that the trauma destroyed; now she must develop a new self" (1992: 196). The novel illustrates that characters react differently to the post-trauma period, while Denver can effortlessly reintegrate into society and start working on the betterment of herself, Sethe still dwells on the past until Paul D comes to help and support her.

In conclusion, Morrison portrays the impact that the racial trauma of slavery has on formerly enslaved people and their offspring, both on an individual and collective level. While she does depict different manifestations of trauma and different coping strategies that characters employ in their attempts to overcome and recover from trauma, Morrison does not offer a singular universal solution to the problems of traumatized individuals and communities. Regarding the portrayal of traumatized characters, Steven V. Daniels makes an insightful observation:

> But while there is no judgement to be made about the choices these characters come to, Morrison does not allow them to view themselves as merely traumatized victims and does not encourage us to do so either. It is at least partly in accepting a burden of responsibility for their impossible choices that they, in the midst of their victimization, achieve and maintain the dignity that most defies what slavery would have them be (2009: 19).

As difficult as their life has been, both in the period of slavery and after slavery was abolished, the characters do not perceive themselves as victims, they do not feel sorry for themselves, and they do not expect any compassion or understanding for their actions. They are very proud of their standing by their choices and taking full responsibility for what they have done, even though they were compelled to make some tough decisions due to complex racial and historical circumstances. The impression remains that Morrison suggests that, while characters cannot control or have any influence on the creation of their traumatized selves, the task of recovering is theirs if they wish to have a chance at a happy, trauma-free life.

6.3 Female characters' identity crises

6.3.1 Sethe

Sethe is the formerly enslaved woman who escapes from Sweet Home, the plantation where she works together with her husband, Halle. Sethe is a strong, proud, and dignified black woman who considers her motherly qualities to be the most defining aspect of her personality. Sethe was born and raised in the historical period of slavery, but she does not allow these circumstances to spoil her beliefs and values. Therefore, she insists on sewing a wedding dress when she decides to get married to Halle, although the common practice among the enslaved people was not to have a proper wedding ceremony or a wedding dress. Additionally, she decides to run away with her children and even murder them in an attempt to protect them from slavery, even though the slaves were not entitled to have personal possessions, including children born in slavery. All of these actions show how desperately Sethe tried to defy the slave system and dehumanizing forms of oppression.

When describing Sethe, Carole Boyce Davies warns: "One has to read Sethe, as a particular Black woman, as the concentration of female identity, not as its aberration" (1994: 138). In many respects, Sethe is a typical woman of the time she lived in. The strength of her character, the fervent wish to protect her children, and her resistance to the institution of slavery are the features that could be attributed to most black women living in these harsh historical circumstances. Apart from this, Davies speaks of yet another typical quality of black women in this historical context: "Sethe, then, is a marked woman, marked physically by abuse, pregnancy, motherhood and other societal inscriptions by white female, by Black male and by the white male inflicter of the abuse which marks her initially" (1994: 138). These

characteristics are also typical of the majority of black women in slavery, as they were all physically marked by lynching and other forms of physical abuse, sexual exploitation, and forced pregnancies, while they were psychologically marked by a total negation of their identity and having to live with these marks and their consequences even though they did not choose them.

Sethe's identity path is marked by slavery, as she was born in slavery and spent the childhood years that are crucial for one's identity development in slavery. Anita Durkin observes that, even though Sethe escaped from bondage, it remained an essential aspect interfering with her identity development: "As a former slave, Sethe similarly lacks, or, more accurately, is denied, a stable sense of self, a continuity of the self" (2009: 184). The institution of slavery deprived Sethe of having a relationship with her parents as she never met her father, and her mother was enslaved, so they could not have formed a healthy and nurturing mother-daughter bond; it also denied her an opportunity to learn her native language and gain knowledge about her cultural tradition and ancestry. However, despite the hardships, Alice Eaton praises Sethe's strength and resilience: "In *Beloved*, Morrison provides a female protagonist who, despite the deep traumas of her slave experience, is able to rise above her sexual, physical and psychological abuse and claim her own agency as a sexual being, a mother and, finally, as a free person" (2013: 62). Once she escaped from Sweet Home, Sethe understood the true meaning of freedom, that she could love and spoil her children as much as she wished, that she had a house only for her family, and that they could celebrate special occasions. Sethe was able to transcend the painful memories of slavery, and thus she displayed the remarkable resilience of black women in the face of the traumatic institution of slavery.

Unfortunately, Sethe's happiness over the newly acquired freedom did not last long. When the Schoolteacher comes to take Sethe and her children back to slavery, she decides to kill all of them, as she considers death to be a much better option than returning to slavery. She only manages to kill her daughter when the Schoolteacher arrives, and, seeing the scene, he decides to leave without Sethe and her children. Christopher Peterson suggests that Sethe, by committing infanticide, transforms from being a victim of slavery into becoming a victimizer: "Sethe kills Beloved so that no one else might kill her. Although seemingly contradictory, Sethe's actions make sense as a form of resistance against the slave master's claim. To kill her own daughter is to claim that daughter as her own over and above the master's claim" (2009: 157). With the act of infanticide, Sethe illustrates that she is presented with two choices and that she chooses what she considers to be the lesser evil, as she believes that this kind of death is less painful and cruel than suffering through all the atrocities of slavery.

When it comes to the ethical judgment of Sethe's act, despite the unfavorable historical circumstances, she was heavily blamed for what she did. As Wilfred D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weems state: "Sethe is nevertheless held accountable, not only by Paul D but also by the community, Denver, Beloved, and ultimately herself" (1990: 108). As harrowing as this act may seem, it appears that none of them takes into consideration an alternative – if Sethe had not murdered Beloved, all of her children and herself would have been returned to slavery. The only reason why the Schoolteacher decided not to take them back was that he witnessed this monstrous scene of a mother killing her child while the other children watched in fear. It can also be argued that no one should feel at liberty to judge Sethe, as none of the other characters found themselves in such a hopeless situation. When it comes to the embodiment of the ghost of Sethe's dead daughter, Morrison describes her decision-making process of including the character of Beloved: "The question for me then became, well, if the law is unwilling to judge, and her mother-in-law can't judge, who can? Who is in a position to condemn her, absolutely, for the thing the courts would not even admit susceptible to litigation?" (2019: 321) Morrison considered the dead daughter to be the only person in a position to judge Sethe, which is why she represents the character that embodies the spirit of the deceased girl.

Discussing infanticide, Samuels and Hudson-Weems express their view on what they consider to be the gravest repercussion stemming from it: "It is possible to argue that the most tragic result of Sethe's heinous crime is the damage that it does to the single most important community of women to her: the community she forms with her daughters, Beloved and Denver" (1990: 120). It is possible to take this argument furthee and say that infanticide caused irreparable damage to Sethe's family, as it did not only harm Sethe's relationship with her daughters but with her sons too, who ran away from the house never to return. Additionally, it severed Sethe's relationship with her mother-in-law, who, although refrained from judgment, saw death as the only acceptable option for herself after infanticide.

Regarding the repercussions of infanticide, Zhu Ying suggests that this experience teaches Sethe that slavery was not the most painful period in her life: "Sethe's story shows that there is an even worse horror than slavery, namely, the enslavement to one's memories and the entrapment in one's own past, which is more destructive than physical bondage, because this engulfing past sabotages the present and forecloses the future" (2006: 57). Although being enslaved was horrendous, at least Sethe had her whole family gathered in one place, and they hoped that their escape plan would be successful which would allow them to have a safe future away from Sweet Home. After infanticide, Sethe is aware that her family will never be complete again, and her present and hopes for the future are tainted with memories of her daughter's death.

The fact that Sethe learned from her past mistakes is evident in her reaction when she hallucinates and thus wrongly imagines that the Schoolteacher is returning to take Beloved away from her. Sethe relives the moment that brought about the most painful event of her life, but she acts differently this time. Sethe decides to attack Mr. Bodwin, whom she imagines to be the Schoolteacher and hence protects Beloved instead of murdering her. John N. Duvall shrewdly describes this scene as "[…] a therapeutic reenactment that purges Sethe's haunted memory and signals Beloved's departure" (2000: 129). After Sethe's failed attempt to attack Mr. Bodwin and the community's interference, Beloved leaves. It can be assumed that Beloved leaves because she feels afraid of the community's wish to exorcise her or she leaves because she served her purpose and helped Sethe deal with her traumatic past. Additionally, Zhu Ying draws attention to the community's behavior that, judging by their wish to save Sethe, also learned from past mistakes: "Not only does Sethe re-enact and readjust her past deed; the community is also given a second chance to right the wrong because it did not warn Sethe of the slave-captors' arrival eighteen years before" (2006: 70). Therefore, Beloved allows both Sethe and the black community to own up for their wrong choices and move toward redemption.

The proudest and most distinctive feature of Sethe's personality is motherhood. As Sethe was born and raised in slavery, she had a very superficial relationship with her mother. Sethe recalls that she never got enough milk when she was a baby and remembered the rumors that her mother was murdered for an attempted escape. The conclusion can be drawn that because Sethe did not have the privilege of having the mother she wished for, she was intent on being the best mother she could be to her children. Speaking of Sethe's motherhood skills, Jean Wyatt comments: "It seems that Sethe's overmothering is her way of compensating for her own lack of a mother: her children will never have to suffer from maternal absence" (2017: 33). Sethe felt neglected as a child, and she grew up yearning for motherly attention and love. Still, despite her mother's lack of nurturing abilities, Sethe created an idealized picture of her mother in her mind. Alice Eaton points to Sethe's awareness that her mother only kept her and murdered all other children that she conceived, as she did not want to take care of children that were the products of rape and abuse while she was in love with Sethe's father: "Thus, Sethe learns that she is a wanted child and that children conceived in love are worth fighting for. Her mother's example establishes the foundation for her own determination to claim her own

sexual, maternal and personal agency as an adult" (2013: 56). As all of Sethe's children were conceived in love, she understood the task of taking care of them, loving them, and nurturing them, very seriously. Sethe knew that she was lucky that Halle, the man she chose to marry, was the father of all her children and that she was never forced into having children for her master. Furthermore, Sethe's portrayal of her mother is clearly based on the naivety of her young age as she refuses to believe that her mother was hanged for an attempted escape. Sethe is convinced that a mother could never leave her child: "I wonder what they was doing when they was caught. Running, you think? No. No that. Because she was my ma'am and nobody's ma'am would run off and leave her daughter, would she? Would she, now?" (Morrison 2005: 240). Although Sethe's memories of her mother date from the period when Sethe was a young girl, even at the moment of telling the story about her mother when Sethe is much wiser and more aware of the reasons why her mother would be willing to leave her child and run away, she rejects the possibility of any mother abandoning her child. Consequently, as a result of her own deprived childhood, Sethe considers nursing her children and not allowing them to remain enslaved (something that her mother did not do for her) as the most important expressions of motherly love. Carmen Gillespie makes a relevant observation when it comes to the importance of breastfeeding for Sethe: "For Sethe, one of the ultimate expressions of freedom and of mother love is having the ability, the time, and the freedom to provide milk for her children – a basic function often denied to women who were enslaved" (2008: 31). This is the reason why Sethe considers the Schoolteacher's nephews' stealing her milk as the worst insult that she had ever endured in the period of slavery, certainly more devastating and painful than whipping.

It can be argued that Sethe's close maternal bond with her children and her obsessive need to protect them also interferes with her identity development. She is solely focused on their well-being and neglects her own interests and needs. Because of her overprotective attitude, she decides to murder her children as she said that: "And no one, nobody on this earth, would list her daughter's characteristics on the animal side of the paper" (Morrison 2005: 296). As Sethe herself had to endure all the dehumanizing forms of oppression, such as physical abuse, stealing of her milk, and Schoolteacher's scientific observations, who concluded that she has animal characteristics, she was determined not to allow the same treatment of her children. Additionally, unconditional love and Sethe's big wish to overcompensate to her children for what she did not have when she was growing up completely negated her identity, as evidenced at the end of the novel when she says to Paul D: "She was my best thing" (Morrison 2005: 321), as Sethe profoundly believes that her children are the best and most important part of her personality and her main reason to live her life.

Nevertheless, at the end of the novel, it seems that Sethe is making significant progress regarding her self-discovery. As noted by Terry Otten: "Having paid full price for her criminal love, Sethe can be reclaimed by the gentle Paul D" (1989: 94). By facing Beloved, Sethe had an opportunity to speak openly about the crime she committed, justify and explain herself. Although Sethe did not want Beloved to leave, she realized what the cost was for dwelling in the past too much, as she neglected her living daughter Denver and quit her job, while her health and physical appearance started deteriorating. When Paul D tells her: "You your best thing, Sethe. You are" (Morrison 2005: 322), Sethe surprisingly asks: "Me? Me?" (Morrison 2005: 322). Sethe's question perhaps reveals that she is finally taking the first step toward the realization that her life has to include more than just her children. This understanding could have been triggered by the fact that all her children abandoned her at this point, even Denver, who was intent on pursuing education and job opportunities.

To sum up, Sethe's character represents the real challenges of being a black female in the period of slavery and its abolition. Patrick Bryce Bjork believes that understanding Sethe's personality helps to comprehend both the individual and collective trauma among the black community:

> We must slowly come to feel the simple joy and monstrous knowledge enclosed in Sethe's rememory as a means of embracing the real and poetical reality of her personal history and perhaps more importantly, as a means to know more truly the self and place of a collective racial memory within a marginalized and oppressed history (1994: 151).

Sethe's life path, fraught with difficult choices, illustrates that there are no correct answers when complex historical circumstances are taken into consideration. Moreover, it demonstrates that racial trauma colors the lives of black people not only during slavery but also long after slavery is abolished, drawing attention to the impossibility of suppressing painful memories. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of dealing with past traumas if one wishes to move forward and overcome the cause of their suffering.

6.3.2 Beloved

Beloved is a mysterious, complex, and contradicting character infused with powerful symbolic and metaphorical meanings open to numerous interpretations. Katrin Amian makes a perceptive comment that "[…] more than fifteen years of extensive criticism on the novel have produced an amazing array of possible answers to the question of who or what Beloved is" (2008: 137). However, despite a myriad of different interpretations of the meaning of Beloved's presence in the novel, the impression remains that she represents something distinctive and unique for each character in the novel and that the metaphorical meaning of this strange figure changes when different perspectives are employed.

The complexity of Beloved's character is also evident in the lack of uniformity in describing her character traits. At times, Beloved is portrayed as a sickly and weak girl desperately seeking love and attention. At other times, she acts as a spoiled and demanding girl who wishes everyone to obey her instructions and fulfill her wishes. She occasionally transforms into a seductive force that no one can resist, giving the impression that she could hurt someone. Beloved's different manifestations make the task of interpreting the true meaning of her presence in the novel even more difficult.

One of the possible interpretations could be that Beloved represents the trauma of slavery, a ghostly figure from the past that comes to haunt the present moment. Deborah Horvitz sees Beloved as the symbol: "Beloved stands for every African woman whose story will never be told. She is the haunting symbol of many Beloveds – generations of mothers and daughters – hunted down and stolen from Africa" (qtd in Watson, 2009: 94). Although Morrison depicts the personal story of one family, this is by no means an isolated example, and there are innumerable families and individuals who suffered through similar atrocities due to racial discrimination and historical circumstances. Beloved's desperate need for attention and love may signify a slave woman's needs, as slaves were never given an opportunity to be loved and cared for, not even by their parents.

In his interpretation of Beloved's character, John N. Duvall presents a more specific idea: "[…] Beloved is, in short, a metonymy for the "Sixty Million and more" of the book's dedication, a number representing those killed, raped, or otherwise physically and psychologically damaged in the history of the American slave trade" (2000: 125). Beloved speaks of her vague and distant memories of being taken away from her mother, being in a dark place, and among dead bodies. The area that Beloved describes could represent the slave ship, as it is known that the conditions were very unsanitary, which contributed to the development of severe diseases and many deaths. In addition to poor hygiene, it is believed that slaves were

also starved and raped, which would explain why more than sixty million people died during the transportation from Africa to America. K. Zauditu-Selassie takes this argument further by saying that Beloved is a: "representative of all the children who were transported into enslavement, not by the waters of the Middle Passage alone, but by the wombs of African women – the primary route that delivered enslaved Africans to their principal roles as plantation laborers" (2009: 159). Children who were transported on slave ships and children born in slavery represent one of the cruelest consequences of the institution of slavery. These children were not given an opportunity to establish a natural connection with their parents; in many cases, they did not even know members of their families, they were forced to leave their motherland, or perhaps they were born in the United States of America, so they did not even know anything about the country their families came from, they were deprived of their native language, cultural heritage, and ancestry, and all of these forms of oppression were happening during the most sensitive and yet crucial years of identity development – in childhood. Therefore, Beloved's desperate need for attention and love, her disjointed language, and her fragmented memories may draw attention to the troubled psyche of enslaved children or, more specifically, the significant influence that slavery had on the identity construction of children born in slavery.

Kevin Everod Quashie adds another reason why it seems probable that Beloved symbolizes the losses of human lives on the slave ship:

> Think how Beloved's character is intended to represent the unspeakable losses of the Middle Passage and the institution of slavery: it is her formlessness, her body that is not a body, that cements her typology. She is out of time and without literal place, as she belongs nowhere and is everywhere (2004: 122).

Beloved's nature simultaneously presents sickness and health, presence and absence, belonging and not-belonging, giving an impression of a fluid being which suggests that it could represent all those people whose lives were tragically ended during the Middle Passage. Perhaps its ghostly appearance comes back to torment the present demanding not to be forgotten. Another interpretation could be that Beloved stands as the monument that would commemorate a vast number of black victims who died because of slavery; she represents the memorial that has never been created. Robert Samuels supports this claim: "Since, as a culture, we have not symbolized and represented these deaths, they are now returning to us in the form of ghosts and spectral presences" (2001: 127). Beloved seems to be the symbol of the unfinished business of the past, both for Sethe, who has not dealt with her monstrous act of infanticide, and the overall black community and the whole population of the United States of America as they have not accepted responsibility for slavery. Beloved suggests that the past cannot be suppressed and that it always finds a way to resurface and force the perpetrators to deal with their acts.

Doreatha Drummond Mbalia offers another interpretation of Beloved: "Interestingly enough, Beloved becomes the symbol by which African people are to measure the devastating effect of isolation – self-imposed or forced. Isolation literally tears apart the family – the nuclear, the extended, and the nation" (1991: 91). Beloved can be seen as the manifestation of isolation; she comes to the house at Bluestone Road 124 alone, and she claims not to have any family or friends, and she imposes alienation on the people she socializes with, she encourages Denver and Sethe to isolate themselves from all other people in their lives and eventually she even manages to exclude Sethe from Denver. A similar description could be attributed to the concept of slavery, as slavery imposes forced isolation by separating individuals from their families, friends, and communities. Additionally, the institution of slavery created an immense

division among the population of the United States, not only between white and black people but also between those in favor of slavery and those against it, and it seems that these divisions persisted long after slavery was abolished.

Regarding possible explanations of what Beloved symbolizes, Daniel Erickson suggests: "Beloved's incomplete transference between the worlds of the dead and the living is associated with the complex relationship between the worlds of slavery and freedom and the characters' ongoing struggle to negotiate these two worlds" (2009: 79). Beloved can be understood as the persisting connection between slavery and freedom. When characters were enslaved under the rule of Mr. Garner, they were given a limited amount of freedom that lulled them into believing they were entitled to have personal possessions, establish meaningful interpersonal relationships, and get married. However, with the arrival of the Schoolteacher, they learned the true meanings of slavery and captivity and started longing for the illusion of freedom they possessed. When they finally became free, they realized that the once-enslaved man could never truly be free, as he remains mentally enslaved by the past and memories. In this respect, Beloved reminds characters of psychological enslavement, showing that suppressed memories and thoughts can easily and irreparably interfere with the present moment.

On the subject of the elucidation of Beloved's symbolism, Evelyn Jaffe Schreiber suggests that: "Beloved verbalizes the struggle to avoid black erasure in white society by stating her need for recognition as accepted subject rather than as a marginalized "other"" (2001: 1). Beloved may stand as a symbol for the collective unconscious and the need to acknowledge the significant black presence in the national milieu of the United States, which should include the accountability for historical injustices and acceptance of black cultural heritage.

According to Lucia Villares's analysis, Beloved represents the loss in both literal and metaphorical sense of the word: "*Beloved* narrates the mourning of a loss. Beloved, the ghost of a beautiful woman, is the embodiment of the girl who was killed. However, she also embodies a much bigger loss, one that encapsulates all the losses that slavery entailed" (2011: 64). Apart from signifying Sethe's murdered daughter, Beloved points to everything that formerly enslaved people lost because of slavery; in the literal meaning of the word, black people lost the members of their families and friends, some of which were lynched, raped, hanged, or killed by the unsanitary conditions and diseases during the Middle Passage; in the metaphorical sense of the word, black people lost their native language, culture, dignity, and human rights.

As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the understanding of Beloved's symbolism varies with different characters in the novel, but it is undeniable that she exerts a strong influence on all the people who establish contact with her. As noted by Petar Ramadanovic, "In a word, Beloved is a reminder of a certain past" (2001: 99). She reminds Sethe of the daughter she murdered, Denver of the sister she never had, Paul of the concealed memories and emotions that he struggled to keep sealed from everyone, the black community of the painful memory of slavery.

Beloved's relationship with Sethe goes through a dramatic transformation from Beloved's desperate need for Sethe's love and attention to Beloved's judging and punishing attitude toward Sethe, demanding explanations and justifications for her actions. Terry Otten analyzes the reversal of their roles, where Beloved becomes the dominating figure and "Sethe, on the other hand, reverts to the helplessness of childhood, the destroyer becoming victim" (1989: 92). The power and authority that Sethe had over her daughter's life when she decided to murder her seem to belong to Beloved now, who enjoys torturing Sethe psychologically and watching her deteriorate. Trudier Harris comments on Beloved's influence over Paul D and Sethe: "She and Paul D are assuredly slaves to Beloved's desire as Sethe and the Pauls were

literally slaves earlier" (1991: 159). Sethe and Paul D act as if they were Beloved's slaves, as they seem unable to resist her requests, even when these sound unreasonable to them. Paul D thus, as much as he wishes to reject Beloved's advances, proves unable to do so, and he engages in sexual intercourse with Beloved, which results in the opening of the tobacco tin in his chest that kept all of his painful memories and feelings that he never wanted to share with anyone. While this act initially brings a lot of misery and desperation, it also helps Paul D to come to terms with his traumatic experiences and to strive for a future life together with Sethe. Beloved's influence over Denver initially shows the depth of Denver's isolation and her compelling need to have a sister or a friend. It also demonstrates Denver's inner feelings about her mother, that she genuinely feels terrified of what she might do, and her secret hope that her father would return one day. However, as Beloved's power over Sethe increases and Beloved and Sethe start excluding Denver from their private conversations, Denver decides to take control over her life; she finds a job, starts taking classes, and, most importantly, reintegrates into the black community. On the other hand, the black community sees Beloved as the ghostly figure representing the past, the traumatic experience that comes back to haunt Sethe, which they see as an opportunity to right the wrong, act differently this time, and fully support Sethe in the exorcism of Beloved.

After the black community's interference and Sethe's attempted attack on Mr. Bodwin, Beloved disappears. It can be argued that Beloved disappears as she sees that her taking advantage of Sethe's kindness came to an end, as a vast number of women come to get rid of her, so she decides to leave quietly. On the other hand, Gurleen Grewal analyzes Beloved's disappearance metaphorically: "[…] Beloved is gone because the past she represents has been confronted; by facing the past, Sethe is released into the present. Beloved disappears, having served her function of "rememory"; the sound and fury is over, and spiteful, loud 124 is finally quiet" (1998: 116). If Beloved's presence is observed as a symbol of past traumas, it is evident that it helped Sethe immensely. Although it was agonizing, Sethe finally spoke about what she considered unspeakable and provided explanations and justifications, which helped her get the most traumatizing event of her life off her chest. Trudier Harris offers another critical perspective regarding Beloved's departure: "Again, Beloved either leaves voluntarily or is driven out. Whatever interpretation we accept, one thing is clear: Sethe and Beloved cannot exist on the same plane. If Sethe is to live, Beloved must depart. If Beloved stays, Sethe can only die" (1991: 163). Sethe's infanticide determined the nature of Sethe and Beloved's relationship; the very act of Beloved's murder saved her mother and siblings from slavery. If Sethe had not killed her daughter, the whole family would have been returned to Sweet Home. However, because of the scope of this painful event, Sethe cannot survive if she has to live with the ghost of her past, reminding her daily of her crime. Consequently, Beloved leaves, as this is the only way for her mother to be given a chance to find happiness without reminders of past traumas.

6.3.3 Denver

Denver is Sethe's youngest daughter. She is a shy, introverted, and isolated girl living with her mother on Bluestone Road 124. Denver symbolizes the profound effect that the trauma of slavery might have on future generations that do not even have firsthand experience of it. Denver was never enslaved, but her mother's fixation on past traumatic events affects Denver profoundly and has a significant influence on her identity development.

Denver is completely isolated from the black community and her peers as she never leaves the confines of the house and only spends time with her mother and the ghost that haunts the house. As a result, Denver becomes socially awkward and introverted, which is why she

reacts strangely when Paul D visits them. Denver and Sethe have not had visitors in years, so Denver responds with an outburst of crying, and she says: "I can't live here. I don't know where to go or what to do, but I can't live here. Nobody speaks to us. Nobody comes by. Boys don't like me. Girls don't either" (Morrison 2005: 17). Denver attended an improvised school for a while where a teacher generously gathered black children in the house wishing to teach them as they could not go to school. However, when a boy who was also attending the school asked Denver whether it was true that her mother had been to prison for murder, she never returned to classes. When she asked her mother whether this was true, she became deaf for two years; deafness emerged as the defense mechanism that prevented her from hearing the answer. Kevin Everod Quashie pinpoints Denver's reaction to the question: "But, more than a system of movement, sound, or heat, memory is a sense, a mode of perception, like the hearing Denver temporarily loses in her attempt to ignore Nelson Lord's questions about what has happened and how much Denver can, or will, remember" (2004: 105). Denver's response to the traumatic event from her family's past is to entirely refrain from learning about it; she chooses not to remember, and she chooses not to hear her mother's answer. Denver's hearing abilities came back with the arrival of the ghost into the house: "The return of Denver's hearing, cut off by an answer she could not bear to hear, cut on by the sound of her dead sister trying to climb the stairs, signaled another shift in the fortunes of the people of 124" (Morrison 2005: 122). Denver's hearing abilities were cut off with the sound she refused to hear, and they were restored with the sound she wished to hear – the sound of somebody who could keep her company and undermine her feeling of loneliness.

It is important to emphasize that Denver experiences several consequences of slavery even though she herself has always been free and has never been enslaved. One of the most important ones when it comes to a young girl's identity construction is the fragmented family that Denver grew up in. Slavery and its repercussions broke Denver's family apart; her father Halle abandoned the family, not being able to deal with the violation his wife suffered through; her two brothers ran away from home after witnessing their mother's act of infanticide; her grandmother sank into depression and died as she could not bear to live with the consequences of slavery and her daughter-in-law's murder of her granddaughter. All of this left Denver alone with her mother, and she was raised by a deeply traumatized and miserable mother who, in many respects, displayed poor parenting skills when Denver's upbringing was considered. By her overt need to protect her children and show them love, Sethe failed to help Denver develop her social skills and become independent. Consequently, Denver did not have any friends; she spent all her time alone at home and entirely depended on her mother. Additionally, Sethe never spoke about infanticide, and in her attempt to protect her only living daughter from learning about this unfortunate incident, she contributed to Denver's alienation from her friends and peers.

Denver often thinks about her father and imagines that someday he will return and protect her from Sethe and reunite their family. Denver never even met Halle, and she does not have any memories of him, which, in Daniel Erickson's opinion, instilled negative feelings into Denver's personality: "Denver envies her mother, grandmother, and Paul D for their apparent "ownership" of Halle's absence, regretting her own lack of ownership of her father's absence" (2009: 35). Denver is jealous of all the people who knew Halle and had contact with him. She occasionally even seems jealous of not sharing the experience of slavery with her mother, Paul D, and Baby Suggs, as her lack of knowledge about slavery and her father makes her feel even more excluded and isolated. In the same way that Sethe longed for the same mark that her mother had so that she could be closer to her, Denver wished she could have been able to spend some time with her father, even at Sweet Home. This illustrates the enormous void that slavery created in black children's lives, as they were often deprived of parents, or even if their parents were alive and present in their lives, they would often be so traumatized and damaged by the

institution of slavery that they would be unable to display good parenting skills and act as appropriate role models.

Furthermore, as Denver was excluded from all the stories from Sweet Home and her present life is not filled with any interesting occurrences, she constantly asks her mother to retell the same story over and over again – the only story from Sethe's past connected with slavery that Denver was a part of – the story about her birth. Denver's insistence on only listening to the story about herself displays her selfishness which emphasizes how lonely and isolated she feels. Denver's thoughts reveal her opinion about all other stories that excluded her: "The rest was a gleaming, powerful world made more so by Denver's absence from it" (Morrison 2005: 74). Being a part of Sethe's past that Sethe was fixated on made Denver feel included and that she belonged to the family.

However, despite the absence of her family members and the lack of social interactions with her peers, Denver felt her life was bearable as long as her mother and the ghost were around. When Paul D arrives and disturbs this family dynamics, Denver's feelings of isolation deepen:

> All that leaving: first her brothers, then her grandmother – serious losses since there were no children willing to circle her in a game or hang by their knees from her porch railing. None of that had mattered as long as her mother did not look away as she was doing now, making Denver *long*, downright long, for a sign of spite from the baby ghost (Morrison 2005: 14).

The fact that the ghost was her only company and that Denver was desperate to see the ghostly presence in her house illustrates the psychological consequences of the traumatized environment on a child. When Beloved appears in their house, Denver finally has the sister she longed for. Her attachment to Beloved is best shown in Denver's willingness to lie for her and protect her rather than her mother. When Paul D tells Sethe that he and Denver saw Beloved being able to pick up a chair which showed that she was not as sick as she pretended to be, Denver denied it, although it was true. Additionally, when she sees Beloved intending to hurt Sethe, she stands up to her, which insults Beloved, who decides to leave, which makes Denver miserable: "This is worse than when Paul D came to 124, and she cried helplessly into the stove. This is worse. Then it was for herself. Now she is crying because she has no self" (Morrison 2005: 145). Denver's statement that "she has no self" without Beloved shows that family and social relationships are of crucial importance for one's identity development. Denver's isolated lifestyle started an identity crisis, resulting in her inability to be alone and her desperate need for love and attention.

However, despite her deep attachment to Beloved, Denver realizes that the world the three of them created, which was based on complete isolation from the outside world, was slowly destroying them. As Sethe left her job, they had no financial means for food and other necessities, and other household residents did not seem to care. Therefore, Denver decides to make some drastic changes: "Somebody had to be saved, but unless Denver got work, there would be no one to save, no one to come home to, and no Denver either. It was a new thought, having a self to look out for and preserve" (Morrison 2005: 297). Up until this moment, Sethe was the one taking care of and providing for Denver, but now she was the one who had to do the same for her mother and Beloved. Denver had to leave her comfort zone, the familiar world of the house at Bluestone Road 124, and reconnect with the black community. Denver found the black community to be generous and supportive, as they offered help, shared food, and helped her find a job to be able to support her family.

Barbara Hill Rigney adequately describes Denver: "Denver is also Morrison's symbol for hope, for the bridge between alienation and community, for the survival of identity, associated as that always is with both race and gender" (1991: 60). Denver progressed from being a symbol of isolation to be a symbol of resilience, depicting that change is possible. As the representative of younger generations, Denver shows how slavery has an enormous impact on children born in slavery or children brought up by formerly enslaved people, despite the fact they had never been enslaved. However, she also illustrates the courage to break free from her overprotective and isolated lifestyle as she finds a job and provides for her family, and she also takes classes and focuses on education, which shows that there is a bright future ahead of her. At the end of the novel, Denver is a mature and bright young woman who has taken control of her life, excluded herself from the traumatized environment, and reintegrated into society.

6.3.4 Baby Suggs

Baby Suggs is Halle's mother and Sethe's mother-in-law. Slavery marked most of Baby Suggs's life, as she only became a free woman when Halle bought off her freedom, and this happened when she already felt too old and weak to have a free life, as she spent the majority of her life doing back-breaking work, being sexually exploited, and psychologically abused. Despite the many hardships she has been through, Baby Suggs symbolizes strength and resilience, as she does not give up in the face of traumatic experiences such as having her children taken away from her and not knowing where her husband is and whether he is still alive. However, when her daughter-in-law murders her granddaughter in order to protect her from slavery, Baby Suggs gives up on life and admits defeat to white people and the institution of slavery as they, apart from taking her husband and children away from her, now also took the life of her granddaughter, and spoiled the bright future of the next generation of her family.

Baby Suggs is the woman who experienced the true meaning of the trauma of slavery. Rafael Pérez-Torres keenly observes: "The story of slavery invoked by *Beloved* and endured by Baby Suggs is premised on the absence of power, the absence of self-determination, the absence of a homeland, the absence of a language" (1997: 94). Baby Suggs gave birth to all her children while in slavery which meant that they belonged to the slaveowner. All her children, except for Halle, were taken away from her, so she did not know what kind of life they had and whether they were alive. Her eight children had six fathers, so she assured Sethe that she was lucky that all her children shared a father, a man she chose to marry, and a man she loved, and that most of her children were still alive and living with her: "You lucky. You got three left. Three pulling at your skirts and just one raising hell from the other side. Be thankful, why don't you? I had eight. Every one of them gone away from me. Four taken, four chased, and all, I expect, worrying somebody's house into evil" (Morrison 2005: 6). However, as sad as it was that Baby Suggs had only vague memories of her children and assumed they were dead, she was lucky to have had such a kind and generous man as Halle for her son. Mr. Garner allowed Halle to buy off freedom for his mother if he took on additional work during the weekends, and in this way, Halle was able to give the most precious gift to his mother – the gift of living her life as a free woman.

Only when Baby Suggs became a free woman did she realize how little she knew about her personality traits because of slavery. Morrison remarks: "Sad as it was that she did not know where her children were buried or what they looked like if alive, fact was she knew more about them than she knew about herself, having never had the map to discover what she was like" (2005: 165). When Mr. Garner called her Jenny, she explained that she preferred the name "Baby Suggs" as she wished to honor her husband, whose name was Suggs and who called her "baby," and she hoped if she kept that name, he would be able to find her if he ever searches

for her. Apart from not knowing her real name, Baby Suggs did not learn about African traditions, cultural heritage, or her mother tongue. Her self-discovery begins when she becomes a free woman, as she finally makes friends, spends time with her family, and finds her true calling – being a spiritual leader and a preacher for the black community. Baby Suggs gathers black people in the Clearing and preaches about self-love and self-acceptance despite the oppressive, dehumanizing, and traumatizing conditions of slavery. The members of the black community attend Baby Suggs' sermons religiously as they offer comfort and hope and show that communal support might be a solution to overcoming such a traumatic period of their lives.

Still, despite Baby Suggs' contributions to the black community, its members betray her when they fail to warn her and her daughter-in-law of the Schoolteacher's arrival to the town, intending to return Sethe and her children to slavery. The communal betrayal and Sethe's act of infanticide provoke Baby Suggs to sink into a deep depression and give up on life. Trudier Harris makes a vital comparison: "To give up voice for silence returns Baby Suggs to the passive, acquiescent role that defined her character during slavery, and indeed makes her a slave to life rather than a master of it" (1991: 175). Baby Suggs comes to the realization that even though she is free and works hard to overcome the traumatic experiences of slavery and help the members of the community in their attempts to come to terms with their painful past, she is still not immune to the consequences of slavery imposed by white people. Baby Suggs never overtly blames her daughter-in-law or the community for the infanticide; she realizes that this act was provoked by the actions of white people: ""Those white things have taken all I had or dreamed," she said, "and broke my heartstrings too. There is no bad luck in the world but whitefolks"" (Morrison 2005: 104).

After the infanticide, Baby Suggs abandons her preaching activities and gives up on life. Morrison comments that: "Her past had been like her present – intolerable – and since she knew death was anything but forgetfulness, she used the little energy left her for pondering color" (2005: 4). It seems ironic that Baby Suggs spends her final days thinking about colors when the most significant problem for the black population in the United States of America has been the color and racial stereotypes that allowed for the institution of slavery to thrive.

Another point worthy of discussion is the influence that Baby Suggs has on the remaining members of her family after her death. Therese E. Higgins makes a shrewd observation: "Black people's grief, of course, is one theme of the novel, but although Baby Suggs lived and died in grief, her returning spirit emits only positive vibes" (2010: 40). Sethe and Denver mention that they often feel Baby Suggs's presence; Sethe claims Baby Suggs made her feel relaxed and massaged her neck before Beloved took over and tried to hurt her, and when Denver decides to leave the house at Bluestone Road 124 in order to seek communal help, she believes that she is encouraged by Baby Suggs' spirit. Additionally, the overall black community has fond and happy memories of Baby Suggs, which is why they provide the members of her family with assistance once Denver gathers the courage to ask for help.

In conclusion, Baby Suggs represents a strong woman who displays the human capacity to survive the most harrowing traumas with the community's support. Through her spiritual leadership, she illustrates the need of the trauma victims and witnesses to gather and deal with their pasts in order to move on with their lives successfully. However, Baby Suggs also demonstrates that even the strongest people have their limits and that they can be brought to depression and even death when betrayed or forced to accept monstrous consequences of slavery, such as infanticide.

6.4 Themes that form problematic narratives surrounding female identity

6.4.1 Racial discrimination, white gaze, and internalized racism

The novel illustrates that black people's journey toward self-discovery has been marked by slavery that was based on racial discrimination. The institution of slavery, together with white people's adoption of the white gaze and black people's development of internalized racism, caused major obstacles on black people's path toward individuation. The institution of slavery and its repercussions have had a profound effect not only on the enslaved black people but also those who were granted freedom and the future generations of black people who did not have firsthand experience of slavery but whose lives were nonetheless marked by traumatic experiences of their ancestors.

According to Arlene R. Keizer, "Enslaved and free blacks were rarely, if ever, able to attain such a sense of self; the constant humiliations visited upon them by the dominant culture in the era of slavery (and for decades afterward) made this virtually impossible" (2004: 29). The institution of slavery completely negated black people's identity, from denying them personal names of their choice, knowledge of their cultural heritage and tradition, to severe form of physical and psychological abuse and sexual exploitation. It can be argued that white people wished to be the ones to determine and shape black people's identities, as they were the ones to give them names, mark them physically in the form of lynching or forcing black women to get pregnant, and scarring them so that they could be easily identifiable. Black people tried to defy these forced definitions, but these attempts were unsuccessful. Anita Durkin sees Sethe's act of infanticide as such an attempt: "On the contrary, one may read Sethe's attempt to murder the children – which is also her successful murder of Beloved – as a (very courageous) attempt to give them an identity beyond the identity of "slave," the identity imposed on them by whites" (2009: 187). By preventing the Schoolteacher from returning her children and herself to slavery, Sethe denied accepting the definition and the slave status that the slaveowner wished to impose on them. Additionally, when Sixo steals a pig and eats it, justifying his actions as improving his working abilities, he also attempts to show that he is much more than a slave who obeys the rules and does physical work. However, the Schoolteacher rejects his attempt, emphasizing his slave status: "Clever, but schoolteacher beat him anyway to show him that definitions belonged to the definers – not the defined" (Morrison 2005: 225).

Nevertheless, even though black people tried to resist the definitions and patterns of behavior that white people imposed on them, the reality was that sometimes what white people thought of them and how they behaved toward them provoked these exact actions that black people tried to avoid. For example, in her attempt to escape the slave status for herself and her children, Sethe murders her daughter, an act that Paul D considers to be characteristic of animal behavior. In this way, Sethe displays the trait that the Schoolteacher would probably list as her animal characteristic and proves that she behaves how he would expect her to. However, Morrison notes that similarities can be observed in the behavior of white people. They treated black people in a dehumanizing way, which often meant that they needed to employ brutal techniques to control and continue oppressing them. In this way, white people would also display animal characteristics. As noted by Morrison:

> It was the jungle whitefolks planted in them. And it grew. It spread. In, through and after life, it spread, until it invaded the whites who had made it. Touched them every one. Changed and altered them. Made them bloody, silly, worse than

> even they wanted to be, so scared were they of the jungle they had made (2005: 234).

Morrison exemplifies the brutal behavior of black and white people, thus showing that displaying characteristics usually attributed to animals is not related to a particular race but to the circumstances that provoke people to act a certain way. The institution of slavery suggests that economic advancement and financial success take primacy over humanity.

Moreover, the institution of slavery tainted black womanhood by sexually exploiting women, forcing them into getting pregnant, enslaving their children, and not allowing them to fulfill their maternal role. Babacar M'Baye analyzes the violation of Sethe: "The whites' selection of Sethe as the object of their sexual violence epitomizes their attempt to subordinate and humiliate not just Sethe, but also the ideals of subversive and resistant blackness and black womanhood that she represents" (2012: 118). The schoolteacher's nephews' violation of Sethe depicts that they show a total disregard for the fact that she is a mother and heavily pregnant at that moment; they do not have any respect for the institution of motherhood, and they use the power that the institution of slavery gives them for their selfish means, without even considering what kind of an effect this will have on Sethe and her children.

One of the reasons why the nephews treated Sethe the way they did is because they, in the same way as the majority of white people in the novel, as well as some black people, adopt the "white gaze" when they perceive black people. The adoption of the white gaze allows white people to judge black people and consider them inferior due to the color of their skin, which contributes to various forms of discriminatory practices against black people, including the institution of slavery.

One of the most prominent examples of the perception of black people through the white gaze is the report about Sethe's infanticide in the newspaper. Morrison mentions that it was not easy for a black person to appear in the newspaper, as the news would not discuss any happy occasions or outstanding achievements done by black people. She further adds: "Nor was it there because the person had been killed, or maimed or caught or burned or jailed or whipped or evicted or stomped or raped or cheated, since that could hardly qualify as news in a newspaper. It would have to be something out of the ordinary" (Morrison 2005: 183). Physical and psychological abuse of black people were daily occurrences, so these did not deserve the spot in the newspapers. However, in Morrison's novel, white people considered Sethe's act of infanticide to be shocking enough to be worthy of media attention. White people's judgment of Sethe's act seems hypocritical, as they do not take into consideration the circumstances that compelled Sethe to murder her daughter or the white people's share of responsibility for her crime. Nevertheless, white people were not the only ones who adopted the white gaze when commenting about infanticide. When Paul D heard of Sethe's act, he compared her actions to the animals': "”You got two feet, Sethe, not four," he said, and right then a forest sprang up between them; trackless and quiet" (Morrison 2005: 194). In this way, Paul D described Sethe in the same manner as Schoolteacher did when he instructed his nephews to list what they considered to be Sethe's animal characteristics. Additionally, when the black community failed to inform Sethe about Schoolteacher's arrival into the town, they allowed their view of Sethe to be blurred by the white gaze, as they considered her to be too proud and pretentious for hosting a pompous party to celebrate her and her children's successful escape from slavery. Morrison denotes the community's willful negligence of the Schoolteacher's arrival: "Not Ella, not John, not anybody ran down or to Bluestone Road, to say some new whitefolks with the Look just rode in. The righteous Look every Negro learned to recognize" (Morrison 2005: 184). Apart from not warning Sethe about the slaveowner's intentions, the black community continued incorporating the white gaze when discussing Sethe; after the infanticide and Sethe's release from prison, they completely ostracized her from the community. Although the

members of the black community experienced similar atrocities due to slavery, evidenced by Ella's confession, who said that she allowed all her children whom white slaveowners fathered to die, they did not show any empathy toward Sethe for what they considered to be the monstrous crime of murder. Moreover, Rachel C. Lee sheds light on Stamp Paid's usage of the newspaper to inform Paul D of the crime Sethe committed: "That is, they use the language of the white judiciary, white newspapers, and white opinion to assess and fix judgement upon Sethe's act" (2005: 195). Instead of telling Paul D about infanticide in another, more subtle, compassionate way, Stamp Paid uses the verbal presentation of Sethe's act written by white people as if illustrating that he agrees with the white perception of the incident.

Another blatant example of the adoption of the white gaze is the Schoolteacher's perception of slaves and his listing of slaves' human and animal characteristics. The Schoolteacher seems to be the proponent of the scientific racism that was prominent in the 19th century. The supporters of scientific racism employed scientific methods to support their thesis that the white race was superior to other races. The French philosopher Arthur de Gobineau was a very influential writer on the topic of scientific racism who considered it necessary "recognizing that both strong and weak races exist" (1915: xiv). De Gobineau explains his stand forthrightly: "Such is the lesson of history. It shows us that all civilizations derive from the white race, that none can exist without its help, and that a society is great and brilliant only so far as it preserves the blood of the noble group that created it…" (1915: 210). Scientific racism gave rise to the justification of slavery, which is the reason why it was widely approved. In the novel, the Schoolteacher seems to consider himself skilled and knowledgeable enough to provide evidence supporting scientific racism. Consequently, he conducts scientific examinations of the enslaved people on his plantation. Patricia Hill Collins offers more information on the main arguments of scientific racism: "Under scientific racism, Blacks have been construed as inferior, and their inferiority has been attributed either to biological causes or cultural differences" (2000: 77). In accordance with scientific racism, Schoolteacher believes that the enslaved Black people are inferior to white slaveowners which is why he criticizes Mr. Garner's kind treatment of enslaved people and opts for more cruel and violent approach in displaying his authority over enslaved people in Sweet Home.

When Sethe accidentally discovers the Schoolteacher's analysis of her human and animal characteristics, she feels deep shame regarding her racial identity. J. Brooks Bouson emphasizes the idea that slavery brings about "[…] the insidious effects of internalized racism – that is, socially produced feelings of self-contempt and self-hatred – on the construction of African-American identities" (2012: 103). Sethe is thoroughly alarmed by the newly discovered facts that Schoolteacher was scientifically studying and measuring her, all the while comparing her to animals; she also decides that her children would never be ashamed about their racial identity in the same way and that no slaveowner would ever have the opportunity to measure, analyze, and compare her children to animals.

Additionally, Morrison illustrates the internalized racism that biracial people feel by including the character of Lady Jones, who had "Gray eyes and yellow woolly hair, every strand of which she hated – though whether it was the color or the texture even she didn't know" (Morrison 2005: 291). While Lady Jones did not like her physical appearance, which signaled her biracial heritage, her light shade of skin allowed her to obtain an education that she later generously shared with the black children who did not have the same privilege. Morrison's statement that Lady Jones "had married the blackest man she could find" (2005: 291) further supports Lady Jones's feeling of racial shame as she obviously wished to show her racial preference with the choice of partner.

When describing characters along racial lines, it is noteworthy to emphasize that Morrison does not depict all white people as cruel, racist, and supportive of slavery. Sethe's thoughts reveal that she does not believe all white people are mean: "Earrings that made her

believe she could discriminate among them. That for every schoolteacher there would be an Amy; that for every pupil there was a Garner, or Bodwin, or even a sheriff, whose touch at her elbow was gentle and who looked away when she nursed" (Morrison 2005: 222). The white girl Amy generously helped Sethe to deliver baby Denver. Although Amy herself was in a hurry to leave for Boston, she assisted Sethe, who was tired, hungry, and suffering from agonizing pain. Sethe was so grateful that Amy helped her that she decided to name her newborn baby after her, realizing that she probably would not have survived without her assistance. Paula Gallant Eckard points to the product of their cooperation: "Thus, two women – midwife and mother, white and black – work together to deliver the baby and, symbolically, the next generation of women" (2002: 68). Faced with the enormous challenge of delivering a baby in poor conditions, the two women neglected each other's color of the skin realizing that racial tensions are irrelevant when people are presented with life-threatening situations.

Unlike Amy, whose kind nature and good intentions are undeniable, it is debatable whether the Garners could be described as good or bad people when their treatment of slaves and their support of the institution of slavery are considered. According to Terry Otten, "The Garners were kindhearted people but also participants in the system – nice Nazis, but Nazis nonetheless" (1989: 86). While the Garners did practice a benevolent form of slavery which meant that they did not abuse their slaves in any way, and they allowed them to express their opinions, get married, and Mr. Garner even let Halle buy off freedom for his mother, it is still evident that they supported the institution of slavery and never intended to free their slaves.

When discussing racial tensions in *Beloved*, Otten makes a perceptive comment: "As in the earlier novels, however much Morrison describes the reality of white cruelty and the pervasive ability of a depraved system to corrupt the oppressed as well as the oppressor, she also insists in *Beloved* on the necessity of personal responsibility" (1989: 81). The novel depicts that white people are to be blamed for the manipulation of racial discrimination as a justification for the creation of the institution of slavery, and for many oppressive forms that they employed to ensure the survival of such an institution, such as violence, sexual exploitation, and infliction of psychological wounds. However, despite these deplorable and occasionally even monstrous conditions, the novel suggests that black people also need to take full responsibility for their actions when they decide to defy and revolt against such a treatment, as they are the ones who would have to live with their actions, as well-intentioned as they were.

6.4.2 Family and motherhood

The concept of family, with a particular emphasis on motherhood, plays a crucial role in Morrison's fiction, and it has an immense impact on the female characters' identity development in *Beloved*. In the words of Paula Gallant Eckard: "Without question, *Beloved* is a powerful chronicle of the social and historical elements of motherhood under slavery" (2002: 65). Enslaved mothers faced many challenges and obstacles which resulted in the creation of many traumatized mother-daughter relationships. As the children did not belong to their parents, but they were the property of the slaveowners, there were many forced separations of children from their mothers. Additionally, as enslaved mothers were also laborers, they worked hard and were very busy, which impacted their ability to properly care for and raise their children, even when they had the privilege of children living on the same plantation as they did. Apart from that, enslaved people suffered through many forms of physical and psychological abuse, and they often lived in very crowded and unsanitary places. All of these challenges testify to Laurie Vickroy's conclusion: "A mother's role in nurturing and socializing her children is compromised when mechanisms of oppressive control such as violence, economic or sexual exploitation, and cultural/mythological representation of women all limit

her options and rights" (2002: 37). Therefore, because of the oppressive historical context they were raising their children in, it can be said that enslaved mothers had a challenging job at performing their motherly role and nurturing their children when they were lucky enough to have their children with them and see them growing up.

Kevin Everod Quashie makes a significant statement that can be linked to yet another challenge of black motherhood: "As an experience, motherhood is one of the social constructs that regulates womanhood and is both a subjection and a subjectivity – a cultural commodity determined and regulated largely by men, even as its condition materializes in and on women's bodies" (2004: 65). In the period of slavery, the concept of motherhood was almost exclusively regulated by white men when black enslaved women were taken into consideration, which meant that black females were often raped, sexually exploited, and forced into carrying out unwanted pregnancies. Even if they were fortunate enough to have a black man of their choice as a father of their children, the establishment of a family unit was not possible, as marriages among slaves were not allowed, and it was widespread that a member of the family would be sold, tortured, or killed, so many black children were raised in broken, matriarchal families.

Still, despite all the obstacles and challenges that black women had to endure, Morrison insists that motherhood was the most defining aspect of enslaved women's identity:

> In *Beloved* I was interested in what contributed most significantly to a slave woman's self-regard. What was her self-esteem? What value did she place on herself? And I became convinced, and research supported my hunch, my intuition, that it was her identity as a mother, her ability to be and to remain exactly what the institution said she was not, that was important to her (2019: 330).

Given the traumatizing lives they were living, it can be understandable why black women found comfort in their children – their children were their descendants, someone who would continue to live after them and who would have their mother's genes, and in this way continue the legacy. Additionally, nurturing and caring for their children provided a sense of purpose for black women in their otherwise pointless lives. Perhaps these are some of the reasons why black women often felt motivated to do things for and to their children that would be considered immoral or illegal.

Sethe is the prime example of a dedicated and loving mother whose love for her children is unconditional and who considers that there are no limits to motherlove. One of the reasons why Sethe is such a committed mother can be found in her relationship with her mother. Arlene R. Keizer describes the nature of their relationship: "Her mother's abandonment of her and the fact that Sethe never got enough milk when she was being nursed are the tragedies at the very base of Sethe's life, and she tries to compensate for her own motherlessness by being a supermother to her children" (2004: 34). As Sethe was born in slavery, she already learned about difficulties of being an enslaved mother when she was a little girl. Sethe remembers her mother telling her about her scars from lynching, how she never had enough milk for Sethe, and how she was killed. Her mother was hanged, probably as a punishment for the attempted escape, but Sethe refuses to accept the thought of her mother abandoning a child even in her old age.

Moreover, Sethe's sense of pride in being a daughter and having children with one man whom she chose and loved dearly stems from the knowledge she obtained as a little girl about her mother's children. As her mother was raped repeatedly, she refused to raise and care for any children conceived by white men, which is why she murdered them. While awareness of this part of her mother's past did teach Sethe that having children with the man she loves is the

most incredible privilege in the period of slavery, it also taught her that mothers have the authority to murder their children, something that Sethe would remember at a later stage in her life.

Speaking of Sethe's characteristics as a mother, it seems necessary to emphasize Andrea O'Reilly's statement: "This yearning to be a daughter originates from Sethe's own displaced identity. Her self has no familial or ancestral grounding" (2004: 88). As Sethe was deprived of any other family member except for her mother who was not able to provide her with proper care, enough milk, or any information about her ancestors and cultural heritage, Sethe's path toward self-discovery was marked with longing for a mother-daughter relationship. Therefore, it is evident that this is the reason why it was so crucial for Sethe to be the best mother she could be and do whatever it took to protect her children.

Since Sethe remembers that she did not get enough milk from her mother, breastfeeding her children seems to be the most expressive way of showing her love and care for them. Sethe takes great pride in having enough milk for her children and ensuring they are always adequately fed. This is why she considers the schoolteacher's nephews' act of stealing her milk as the worst and most distressing experience she has ever had to endure. As noted by Lovalerie King, "[…] she is deeply wounded (both emotionally and physically) when schoolteacher supervises his nephews in her forced milking – as he would livestock" (2003: 59). Sethe had previously felt ashamed when she found out that Schoolteacher and his nephews analyze and list her animal characteristics, but now her feelings of racial shame and embarrassment deepen, as she is now indeed treated like an animal. Greg Forter offers his view on the incident: "The scene in which the pupils steal Sethe's milk is thus one that allegorizes the violence by which slavery compromised not just black women's efforts to "realize" their life-sustaining capacities but also their ability to transmit to their children the very substance of love" (2014: 78). By stealing her milk, the Schoolteacher and nephews dirtied the most important symbol of black motherhood but also showed the total disrespect for the institution of the family.

When Sethe escaped slavery, she admitted that her attitude and emotions toward her children changed: "Look like I loved em more after I got here. Or maybe I couldn't love em proper in Kentucky because they wasn't mine to love. But when I got here, when I jumped down off that wagon – there wasn't nobody in the world I couldn't love if I wanted to" (2005: 190). For the first time in her life, Sethe felt free to love and spoil her children as much as she wished. The feast Sethe and Baby Suggs held for the whole community, which the community members considered too pompous, symbolizes Sethe's happiness that she and her children successfully escaped slavery and were free to love each other. However, as bell hooks observes: "We know that slavery's end did not mean that black people who were suddenly free to love now knew the way to love one another well" (2015: 144). Sethe's possessive and overprotective form of love proves to be fatal for her family as Sethe, by committing infanticide, irreparably breaks her family apart. Sethe insisted that her decision to murder her children was right, as she sincerely believed that life in slavery was worse than death, having experienced the physical and psychological abuse of slavery herself. However, as the circumstances changed and Sethe only murdered one daughter, the excruciating pain she felt over her daughter's death prevented her from seeing what kind of an impact this traumatic event had on the rest of her children. Her children felt frightened of their mother, which encouraged her two sons to run away from home and Denver to secretly hope that her father would return one day and keep her safe from Sethe.

When Beloved comes to the house at Bluestone Road 124, Sethe perceives her as the embodiment of her murdered daughter, and she wishes to compensate for the time she has lost with her and for her monstrous crime, so Sethe fulfills all her wishes and tirelessly offers explanations and justifications for her actions. Marianne Hirsch sees a deep symbolism in Sethe's attempt to justify herself: "When Sethe tries to explain to Beloved why she cut her

throat, she is explaining an anger handed down through generations of mothers who could have no control over their children's lives, no voice in their upbringing" (1989: 197). Since slavery is the primary culprit for Sethe's decision to commit infanticide, Beloved can be seen as the symbol for all the children who died because of slavery, illustrating their mother's inability to protect them.

When discussing the influence of slavery on black people's emotions, Nancy Berkowitz Bate presents a critical perspective: "Morrison's novel thereby brings to the fore perhaps the most tragic result of slavery – that it inculcates in the slave an inability to conceive of love dissociated from the paradigm of ownership and a reluctance to love wholeheartedly" (2006: 41). For many enslaved people, the notion of love is closely associated with possession, as they literally do not own themselves and are unable to own anybody or anything else, they often feel that it is too dangerous to develop strong feelings for anyone, even their own children, as they could easily be bought or sold, never to be seen again. Paul D agrees with this statement which is why he tells Sethe that her love is "too thick" (Morrison 2005: 193), believing that the intensity of Sethe's love compelled her to murder her daughter. However, Sethe confronts his opinion by saying: "Love is or it ain't. Thin love ain't love at all" (Morrison 2005: 194). Sethe is an unrelenting woman who considers her motherlove to be the proudest feature of her personality. However, it seems that Sethe gradually, over the course of the novel, teaches Paul D about the possibility of falling in love, or, as Carolyn C. Denard states: "The novel progressively becomes a story about the ability, the willingness of those who were not beloved, to love" (2012: 47). Paul D has never felt loved, and he has never wished to spend future with anyone until he has shown acceptance and understanding of Sethe's crime and realized that, due to their shared history, he and Sethe have a possibility to join forces and combat the ghosts of the past together.

Carolyn C. Denard believes that Morrison, through the portrayal of the traumatized family relationships, depicts the importance of love for black people's mental well-being: "Morrison tells us this history to show us the power of love despite it. She wants her readers to understand that while blacks were often driven to excess by the cruelties of slavery, slavery was not allowed to excuse those actions" (2012: 53). Morrison illustrates that, despite the adverse historical circumstances and the immeasurable amount of pain that slavery caused black people, it is necessary to keep loving the children, partners, members of the family, and friends, as love was the only driving force that helped them survive; love encouraged Sethe to escape slavery while pregnant, love for her grandchildren helped Baby Suggs preach about self-love and support her family adjust to freedom even though she assumed all her children were dead; self-love inspired Denver to look for a job and seek educational opportunities; love helped Paul D sympathize with Sethe's pain and return to her. Although love persuaded characters into committing some unforgivable acts, it also inspired them to forgive themselves for the traumatic experiences of the past that they cannot change.

6.4.3 Men and women

Beloved explores the profound impact that men and the complex relationships between men and women have on the female sense of self during the period of slavery and after its abolition. Morrison illustrates that male influence on female characters can be either destructive or transformative, depending on the nature of the relationship between a man and a woman and the female responses to male influences. David E. Magill draws attention to the challenging circumstances surrounding black male slaves: "Morrison's fiction reflects anxieties of African American men regarding their identities, tensions rooted in the dehumanizing treatment accorded them in slavery, and the continued debasement directed at

them through individual and structural racism" (2003: 202). In the same way as female slaves, male slaves went through many forms of physical and psychological abuse. However, male slaves had the additional burden of observing the women in their lives, such as their partners, mothers, and sisters being tortured, sexually exploited, and raped, and they could not do anything to interfere and protect them. This meant that black slaves often struggled with feelings of insecurity, racial shame, and emasculation on their roads to self-discovery, which also significantly influenced black females in their lives.

Halle is probably the most influential male presence when it comes to the majority of female characters in the novel. Halle is kind-hearted and generous; he makes an agreement with Mr. Garner to buy off the freedom for his mother so that she would not have to work on a slave plantation anymore; Halle's selfless act impressed Sethe, who decides he would be the person she would marry. Halle and Sethe started their life together on a slave plantation and had three children, with the fourth one on the way, when Halle experienced a complete loss of self. Halle watched the Schoolteacher's nephews' violation of Sethe, powerless to stop them and save his wife. This traumatic experience shattered Halle's world as he abandoned his escape plan with his wife and children, and his family never saw him again. All the members of Halle's family were kept in ignorance of what happened with Halle until Paul D arrived at the house at Bluestone Road 124 and told Sethe that Halle witnessed the nephews' violation of her and stealing of her milk. Paul D told her: ""It broke him, Sethe." Paul D looked up at her and sighed. "You may as well know it all. Last time I saw him he was sitting by the churn. He had butter all over his face"" (Morrison 2005: 82). Paul D implies that Halle was devastated by what he saw and perhaps became mentally ill. Paul D had a bit in his mouth, which is why he could not talk to Halle and discover what had happened. Upon hearing Paul D's explanation of the probable reason for Halle's disappearance, Sethe felt hurt that Halle did not overcome the trauma of being a witness to something that she was forced to experience. Julie Cary Nerad pinpoints the leading cause of Halle's loss of sanity: "Halle's inability to protect his wife – the effective erasure of his masculinity – drives him to madness" (2006: 56). By violating Sethe, the Schoolteacher's nephews' act did not only harm the sacredness of black motherhood, but it also emasculated Halle, as he was powerless to protect the mother of his children.

Sigmund Freud explains the effect that a severe trauma might have on a man:

> It does also happen that persons may be brought to a complete standstill in life by a traumatic experience which has shaken the whole structure of their lives to the foundations, so that they give up all interest in the present and the future, and live permanently absorbed in their retrospections (1943: 244).

It is possible to assume that this happened to Halle; he was faced with a traumatic event that violated his wife, his family, and his understanding of himself as the man and protector of the family. He found this event so harrowing that the present moment and the idea of the future with his family became pointless.

When analyzing Halle's personality, it is noteworthy to mention that the novel gives examples of different ways how people deal with the horrible consequences of slavery. Halle and Stamp Paid both witnessed their wives being abused, but unlike Halle, who proved to be psychologically weak and unable to deal with the trauma he witnessed, which is why he abandoned his family, Stamp Paid takes control of his life, changes his name as a symbol of the fresh start, and dedicates his life to a good cause and starts helping black people.

Halle's absence influences his family members significantly. His two sons, probably learning from their father's example, leave the house when they witness a traumatic event that makes them feel scared of their mother. Having never met her father and living with a mother she is frightened of, his daughter Denver becomes introverted and lonely, hoping that her father

will return one day. On the other hand, Sethe is aware that Halle will not return: "There will never be a day, she thought, when Halle will knock on the door. Not knowing it was hard; knowing it was harder" (Morrison 2005: 112). Sethe displays great strength of character in the face of Halle's absence, showing that she can deal with severe trauma, raise children, run away while pregnant, and make some tough choices, all on her own. Halle's absence taught Sethe that she could not rely on anyone, not even the father of her children, to support and help her in her hour of need, which is perhaps one of the motivating factors that encouraged her to murder her daughter.

Another man who impacts Sethe and Denver's life to a large extent is Paul D, a former slave who was born and raised on a slave plantation. Paul D's life was primarily marked by slavery, violence, and oppression. While he lived and worked on the Sweet Home plantation, he overheard the slaveowner, the Schoolteacher, mentioning Paul D's price, which changed his understanding of his value as a human being, and he lived with the knowledge that he was worth 900 dollars until the rest of his life. Carmen Gillespie explains the implications of Paul D's knowledge about his price: "Hearing his worth spoken aloud reinforces his feeling of unworthiness and his understanding that, legally and in the eyes of a great number of people, he is no better than an animal" (2008: 31). Slavery reduced black people's identities to the status of commodity, something that could be easily sold, bought, and replaced, and whose worth was determined by the amount of physical work they can do and how many children they can bring into the world. Another critical moment that Paul D remembers from his slave years is wearing a bit in his mouth. The bit was a metal piece placed in the enslaved person's mouth to prevent them from talking or shouting. The Schoolteacher used the bit to punish Paul D because he tried to escape. Morrison comments on her decision to describe the bit as a powerful symbol of enforced silence: "Now that was the parallel of my attitude toward the history, toward the institution of slavery, that is, I didn't want to describe what it *looked* like, but what it *felt* like and what it meant" (2019: 324). Forcing the enslaved person to wear a bit in their mouth quite literally takes their voice away, while the institution of slavery already took the slaves' voice in the metaphorical sense of the word, as they were not entitled to any rights, opinions, or choices, now slaveowners also used the bit to take away their ability to speak. When he was wearing a bit, Paul D saw a rooster on the plantation and thought how animals had more freedom than he did: "Mister, he looked so…free. Better than me, Stronger, tougher. Son a bitch couldn't even get out the shell by hisself but he was still king and I was…" (2005: 86). The irony that the animals had more freedom as they were able to move around and make sounds unlike Paul D who was forced to be silent, terrified him.

Eventually, the Schoolteacher sold Paul D to Brandywine, whom Paul D attempted to murder, after which he was sent to prison in Georgia, where he experienced even worse forms of abuse. Herman Beavers provides details on the horrible conditions: "Life on a chain gang is the very embodiment of tight space – cut off from loved ones, traumatized by arbitrary forms of discipline, the eradication of all those things that make a man an individual among the many" (2018: 111). The prisoners were locked in small boxes in the ground at night and were expected to work during the day while being tied together with chains. However, the chained prisoners managed to escape to the Cherokee camp, where Native Americans released them from chains and gave them food. Carmen Gillespie points to the cooperation between two oppressed groups: "There are many historical instances of Native Americans and African Americans joining forces and resources to assist each other" (2008: 35). By illustrating that black prisoners were able to escape from white oppressors with the help of Native Americans, the novel might suggest that the cooperation and joining forces of the inferior groups is the best way to stand up to the cruel treatment of those exercising authority.

Since Paul D suffered through many traumatic experiences, he developed a coping mechanism which included keeping all his painful memories and thoughts in the "tobacco tin

buried in his chest where a red heart used to be. Its lid rusted shut" (Morrison 2005: 86). However, this meant that he was suppressing his past and that he never came to terms with his traumatic experiences. His encounter with Beloved changes this and forces him to deal with the terrifying moments of his past. Gurleen Grewal expounds on the symbolic meaning: "Metaphorically, in touching Beloved, Paul D is touching the past inside him and is in the process of being healed: the lid of his rusty tobacco tin has been dislodged, and as the tightly guarded content of the past is spilling out, he begins to find his "red heart"" (1998: 109). Beloved forces Paul D to relive everything that he considers to be unspeakable. Paul D's attempt to resist Beloved illustrates the futility of running away from the past. When he gives in to Beloved, he starts releasing all the traumatizing and painful memories and thoughts, and he is finally able to accept and come to terms with his past, which is the first step on his road to trauma recovery.

After Paul D deals with his and Sethe's traumatic pasts and accepts them as the intrinsic parts of their personalities, he can finally imagine their future together as he realizes that "He wants to put his story next to hers" (Morrison 2005: 322). Paul D does not give up on Sethe but, having started the process of healing from trauma himself, wishes to assist her in her struggle to overcome the most traumatizing event in her life and show her that there is "some kind of tomorrow" (Morrison 2005: 322) that is worth fighting for.

In conclusion, Halle and Paul D prove to be the two most influential male figures in Sethe and Denver's lives. While Halle shows by example that running away from hardships and traumatic past can only bring sorrow to the lives of loved ones, Paul D refuses to be defined by his past and illustrates that it is excruciatingly painful to confront the past traumas, but it is possible to heal from them in order to focus on the present and create a new future.

6.4.4 Violence

The novel explores the physical and psychological consequences of violence that the institution of slavery inflicted on female characters and how the lingering effects of violence impede their identity development. Morrison offers vivid and poignant portrayals of physical abuse that enslaved people endured, such as lynching, beatings, murders, sexual abuse, and stealing of milk. Sethe remembers her mother showing her the scars from lynching, which Anita Durkin labels as "an imposed identity, a construction and an invention of the whites" (2009: 177). White people marked black people physically to exert their authority, instill fear, and show black people that they do not own their bodies. However, when it comes to the analysis of Sethe's mother's scars, Carolyn M. Jones notes the more profound symbolism: "Thus, the mark becomes a sign of community, identity, and wholeness, and Sethe, the chosen child, has to remember the stories and witness her people's history – and her own" (1999: 146). Apart from signifying white supremacy and slaves' loss of true selfhood, scars from lynching can also be perceived as the symbol of unity and collective identity for black people, as the horrendous trauma of slavery was a shared experience for them. Therefore, Sethe's mother shows her scars to her daughter so that she would remember the painful history of black people and pass down the knowledge to future generations.

When it comes to female characters, Morrison openly discusses the sexual abuse they suffered, including rape, forced pregnancies, the continuation of physical abuse even when they were pregnant, and the impacts of these acts on the female psyche. When she was a young girl, Sethe learned about the sexual exploitation of female slaves from Nan, the wet nurse who was on the same slave ship as Sethe's mother and who adopted the role of her othermother by breastfeeding Sethe and taking care of her when her mother could not. Babacar M'Baye comments on Nan's story: "Nan's story is both individual and representative, evidencing

repeated instances of her sexual and reproductive exploitation as well as that of enslaved black women in general" (2006: 176). By telling her and Sethe's mother's stories, Nan informs Sethe that black women were repeatedly raped and forced to get pregnant so that they could provide the next generation of slaves for the slaveowner for free; moreover, just because they were pregnant, that did not mean that they were released from doing hard physical work on the plantation; they were also expected to prioritize white babies of their masters when it comes to breastfeeding which is why many black children, just like Sethe, were being starved. All these examples illustrate that white people had very little respect for black womanhood, and yet they depended on them for multiple purposes: to do plantation work, to ensure the next generation of enslaved people, and to breastfeed and take care of their own white children.

When Sethe tells Paul D about the Schoolteacher's nephews' whipping her and stealing her milk, she almost disregards the fact that she was physically hurt and scarred while she was pregnant. For Sethe, the greatest insult is that they took her milk when she needed it for her baby. When the nephews violated her, they degraded the most critical aspect of her personality – her pride in being a mother who can provide her children with everything they need, especially milk, which she did not have enough of when she was a baby.

In many cases of violence, black people responded with violence, often bringing even more misery into their lives. Alvin O. Thompson remarks on aggressive methods that black people employed: "The oppressed resorted to counter-violence, either to escape the trammels of slavery or as retribution. But it is always a tricky call in human society to use force to settle grievances or achieve specific objectives" (2006: 30). Sethe, her mother, Ella, and probably many other enslaved black women responded to the violence of slavery with the ultimate mother's crime – murders of their children. Sethe's mother and Ella refused to raise children that were conceived by white people who abused them, and Sethe did not allow her children to return to slavery. While Sethe's mother and Ella do not seem to regret their decisions as they believe that pregnancies should be a matter of choice for women and not forced upon them, Sethe's crime had many consequences for both her psyche and the well-being of her whole family. Sethe planned to murder all her children, and Theresa N. Washington claims there is a valid reason why she wanted to murder the girls first: "They are the ones who can grow to have their milk stolen, their wombs defiled, their womanhood mocked" (2009: 59). Being a woman herself, and having endured the humiliating, dehumanizing treatment of her womanhood, Sethe did not want to allow her daughters ever to have to experience that. Although it would have been logical if she killed the boys first as they were older and they had a basic understanding of what was happening, Sethe evidently believed that women suffered more in slavery, which is why she decided she would murder the girls first. Sethe lists the worst aspects of slavery: "That anybody white could take your whole self for anything that came to mind. Not just work, kill, or maim you, but dirty you. Dirty you so bad you couldn't like yourself anymore. Dirty you so bad you forgot who you were and couldn't think it up" (Morrison 2005: 295). According to Sethe's interpretation, the institution of slavery completely annihilated black women's identity; apart from the arduous physical work that both male and female slaves were expected to do, women had an additional burden in the form of sexual and reproductive exploitation.

However, when it comes to the ethical judgment of Sethe's act, Terry Otten shares his view on the subject: "It is understandable but not excusable" (1989: 82). While Sethe and the historical context of slavery provide plenty of reasons and justifications for infanticide, it is debatable whether Sethe should have been the one to make such a fateful decision and terminate someone's life, even if she did have best intentions. On the other hand, Julie Cary Nerad provides a counter-argument, blaming the institution of slavery: "If the infanticide is indeed the act of an animal rather than the ultimate sacrifice of a mother, the slave system is culpable" (2006: 56). Nerad emphasizes the fact that the Schoolteacher's actions of physical and psychological abuse, his encouragement of his nephews to steal Sethe's milk, and scientific

examinations of enslaved people's animal and human characteristics directly contributed to Sethe's decision to commit infanticide. Additionally, Morrison emphasizes Sethe's strong feelings for her children: "A woman loved something other than herself so much. She had placed all of the value of her life in something outside herself. That the woman who killed her children loved her children so much; they were the best part of her and she would not see them sullied" ("A Conversation" 1994: 207). Sethe's love for her children was unconditional. However, it is also relevant to emphasize that the institution of slavery has already taken so much from Sethe: it murdered her mother, deprived her of carefree childhood, caused Halle's depression and his subsequent disappearance, tortured Baby Suggs, the woman who was her most significant source of support. Therefore, it is understandable why Sethe did not want to also lose her children to slavery.

While various forms of violence largely impacted female characters' path toward self-discovery, it also made them aware of their strength, resilience, and their ability to fight back and protect their loved ones. At the same time, while physical and psychological abuse reawakened black women's strength and protective instincts, it also revealed the consequences of giving too much power to one category of people, as slavery caused both white and black people's animal instincts to resurface.

6.4.5 Community

One of the critical influences on female character's identity construction is the role of community in their lives; the novel illustrates that the role of the community can be very positive and provide support, help, and comfort, but their impact can also be destructive and make characters' traumatic experiences more painful and tragic.

By illustrating the black community's cooperation in their attempts to help enslaved people escape and start a new life as free people, the novel shows the importance of solidarity and working together. When the black community led by Stamp Paid assists Sethe and her children, they show that even the cruelest forms of oppression can be rejected when the community is united.

Furthermore, Baby Suggs's leadership and preaching skills when she gathers the members of the black community and teaches them about self-love and self-acceptance demonstrate the healing power of companionship and how sticking together may help deal with and potentially overcome traumas. K. Zauditu-Selassie elucidates the meaning of communal gatherings: "[…] the Clearing represents the space for Africans to repair the ruptures of the past using dance movements to free their bodies from the trauma imposed by enslavement's limited opportunity for mobility" (2009: 158). By coming together and sharing their experiences under the guidance of Baby Suggs, the black community makes an effort to overcome the collective trauma of slavery together.

However, despite the solidarity and the impression of unity that the black community displayed in their rescuing missions and communal gatherings, the black community betrays Sethe on what turns out to be the most fateful day of her life. The black community fails to warn Sethe of the Schoolteacher's arrival, resulting in Sethe's murder of her daughter. The community lets Sethe down because they are bothered by the pretentious feast she holds to celebrate her successful escape from slavery. Teresa N. Washington analyzes the community's behavior: "Sethe's crime of displaying wealth is an ironic one that speaks volumes about the complexities of the Africana community" (2009: 60). While it can be understood that the black community would disapprove of Sethe's pompous attitude, is it excusable that they did not warn her of the potential return to slavery simply because of her boastful demeanor? It appears that the black community proved that social and class differences are significant, despite all of

them belonging to the same race and sharing the common history of slavery. The community's contempt seems to have increased after the infanticide. Amy M Green believes that the members of the community would have forgiven Sethe for the infanticide, but they were not able to forgive her for being too proud: "Rather, scorn evolves from their perception of Sethe's pridefulness, that she holds her chin up in defiance and refuses to break down and ask the other women and mothers for forgiveness" (2010: 121). After the infanticide, Sethe gave an impression of self-sufficiency, of not requiring the black community's help and support, which insulted them greatly. In the black culture, it is part of the tradition to rely on the members of the community, and the black population in Cincinnati illustrated with helping black slaves escape and with participating in communal gatherings in the Clearing that they consider collaborative support and sympathy to be of great importance. However, when they betrayed Sethe, she did not wish to depend on them in any way, so she acted proudly and arrogantly.

Nevertheless, despite Sethe's estrangement from the community, when the female members of the community learn of the haunting presence that tortures Sethe, they decide to gather and help her. Herman Beavers describes their rescue mission: "The thirty women that gather outside 124 to exorcise the ghost symbolizes the power of collective resistance to overcome individual forms of crisis but it does not involve asking Sethe whether she requires intervention" (2018: 82). Morrison illustrates that the genuine gesture of solidarity includes interference even when one is not aware that they need it. Sethe was so engrossed in her relationship with Beloved that if anyone asked if she needed help, she would have refused, afraid not to harm her bond with Beloved. Therefore, the crucial step in Sethe's rescue was the community's insistence to exorcise Beloved and help Sethe, regardless of her wishes. Katrian Amian observes that the community of women "[…] is not 'strong' and 'empowering' at all, but internally divided, marked by differences in class and social standing, by racial hierarchies and human prejudices" (2008: 136). It appears that the black community has made significant progress in their opinions and viewpoints; unlike the previous time when they failed to warn Sethe of the Schoolteacher's arrival, this time they disregarded all their social, class, and economic differences, and they came to Sethe's house united, insistent on chasing the enemy away. Apart from exorcising Beloved, the community of women also prevents Sethe from attacking Mr. Bodwin. Danielle Russell pinpoints the importance of this act for Sethe's future: "The desire for vengeance and need for atonement converge in a deadly and disturbing connection that can only end in destruction. Timely intervention by the community rescues Sethe from being completely annihilated" (2006: 140). Sethe's intention to respond to the previous crime of infanticide with another crime, especially the crime of hurting a man who was always kind and generous to her family, would wreck Sethe's identity. Therefore, the community of women helps Sethe in two ways: by stopping her from making a grave mistake due to her troubled psyche and by exorcising Beloved, the source of her pain and her connection to the past. In this way, the novel demonstrates that communal unity is necessary to eliminate Beloved and forget her. The same can be applied to what Beloved represents; the cooperation and solidarity of the community are paramount in dealing with and overcoming the trauma of slavery.

The role of community is of crucial importance for female characters' identity development in all of Morrison's novels analyzed thus far. Terry Otten makes a shrewd conclusion regarding the pivotal role of the community: "In all Morrison's novels alienation from community, or "the village," invariably leads to dire consequences, and the reassertion of community is necessary for the recovery of order and wholeness" (1989: 93). *Beloved* illustrates that sticking together, cooperating, and helping each other can lead to recovery from traumas, as evidenced by Sethe's triumphant escape from slavery, healing communal gatherings, and the successful exorcism of Beloved. On the other hand, alienation from the

community and failure to help a community member in their hour of need might have dire and even tragic consequences, as demonstrated in Sethe's act of infanticide.

6.5 From deadly silence to speaking about the unspeakable

Beloved examines the essential themes of motherhood, physical and psychological abuse, the community and the alienation, the power of memory and traumatic past, and the interconnectedness of these themes in the historical context of slavery and its aftermath, as well as their overwhelming influence on female characters' identity development. As Arlene R. Keizer notably remarked: "*Beloved* both recognizes and problematizes the fragmentation of identity" (2004: 29). Both the enslaved people and former slaves experience the loss of true selfhood due to the institution of slavery that allowed for their sexual and reproductive exploitation, numerous forms of abuse, and deprived them of their human rights, names, native languages, and cultural heritage. However, in addition to many obstacles that interfere with their individuation processes, the characters themselves often make poor choices that make their journeys toward self-discovery even more challenging.

Doreatha Drummond Mbalia summarizes the central theme of the novel in the following way: "One people, one struggle, one solution – this is the theme of Toni Morrison's fifth novel, *Beloved*" (1991: 88). Morrison suggests that black people share the common struggle - the racial trauma, that had many disastrous consequences, one of them being the institution of slavery. Additionally, the novel implies that it is possible only by cooperating and working together to face past trauma and overcome it. As illustrated in the novel, alienation from the community can only bring more misery and may even cause tragedies.

One of the critical influences on female characters' identity construction is the trauma of the past. The characters are constantly reminded of past events that they have not dealt with, and they are surrounded by literal and metaphorical reminders of slavery, such as the tree on Sethe's back that reminds her of the Schoolteacher and his nephews' whipping and stealing of her milk, Paul D's arrival to the house at Bluestone Road 124 whose stories reveal new pieces of information about their life on the slave plantation, and most notably, the ghostly presence of Beloved who represents the embodiment of Sethe's murdered daughter and symbolizes the traumatic past of slavery. Morrison explains why she decided to introduce the company of such a mysterious figure: "And the purpose of making her real is making history possible, making memory real – somebody walks in the door and sits down at the table so you have to think about it, whatever they may be" ("In the Realm of Responsibility" 1994: 249). Beloved's arrival brings the characters' traumas to the surface and forces them to deal with them. Consequently, Paul D reminiscences about the painful thoughts and feelings of the past that he suppressed; Denver admits that she feels afraid of her mother and longs for her father's return; Sethe finally starts speaking about what she considered to be unspeakable and provides explanations and justification for the crime that she committed.

However, the prolonged presence of Beloved starts affecting the residents of the house at Bluestone Road 124 in a negative way, as Sethe quits her job, stops providing financial means for her family, and her health starts deteriorating due to food deprivation and psychological torture that Beloved puts her through demanding her attention, love, and criticizing her for her past actions. At this point, Denver decides to take control of her life, asks the black community for assistance, finds a job, and pursues educational opportunities. For Denver, accepting her sister's death brings self-confidence and courage to leave the isolated world of the haunted house and reintegrate into society. Denver's act of reaching out for help also gives the black community a chance to right the wrong they did when they failed to inform Sethe of the Schoolteacher's arrival, resulting in Sethe's murder of her daughter. This time, the

black community exorcises Beloved and, with it, helps Sethe deal with past traumas. Gurleen Grewal summarizes the gist of the novel by saying: “Organized by fragments coming together, the novel is about healing the self and uniting the traumatized individual with the community” (1998: 104). The novel emphasizes that the connection with the community is of crucial importance for one’s identity development, as reintegration into society and allowing oneself to find support and comfort in the community might help overcome the traumatizing events from the past.

As previously mentioned, another crucial aspect of female characters’ identities that was severely traumatized by the institution of slavery is motherhood. Enslaved women were sexually and reproductively exploited, their children were often taken away from them, and even when they had the privilege of raising their children, the adverse historical circumstances included many obstacles, such as black mothers’ not having enough milk, time, and energy to raise and care for black children as they had to prioritize white children and white people’s needs. Marianne Hirsch notes: “If mothers cannot “own” their children or even themselves, they experience separation and loss all the more intensely” (1989: 6). Therefore, when they become free and can possess and love their children, the mothers respond violently to any potential danger to their relationship with children.

Nevertheless, despite all the historical, racial, and social obstacles, the novel illustrates that it is possible to overcome traumatic experiences if one comes to terms with the past, reintegrates into the community, and focuses on the present moment. Carolyn C. Denard believes that this idea hides the message of the novel: “For as Morrison has shown in the writing of Beloved, what lies beyond the bitterness of the history revealed in this novel is a people trying desperately, triumphantly, dangerously even, to forgive and to love” (2012: 53). Throughout the novel, the characters never give up on love, whether it is familial love, communal love, mother-daughter love, or love between partners; they show that their ability to love one another helps them through the darkest of times and illuminates their way toward the future. As noted by Andrea O’Reilly, “Morrison’s writings call upon her readership to recognize, affirm, and celebrate the “me”; and to love, as Baby Suggs preaches in *Beloved*, the person we are” (2004: 39). Self-love and self-acceptance are crucial steps on the road to trauma recovery; this is evidenced by Denver who accepts her values and decides to go out in the world to prove herself, the black community that finds comfort and support in Baby Suggs’s preaching sermons about self-love, and Sethe who, after a long time, starts acknowledging the existence of her personality independently of her children.

Morrison believed that “this has got to be the least read of all the books I’ve written because it is about something that the characters don’t want to remember, I don’t want to remember, black people don’t want to remember, white people won’t want to remember” (“The Pain of Being Black” 1994: 257). The novel tackles a harrowing historical episode but simultaneously teaches about the importance of reclaiming history, as accepting the institution of slavery and the Middle Passage and acknowledging the suffering of black people are fundamental aspects of the national identity. Herbert William Rice shrewdly concludes:

> The words “my people” in the inscription imply that every American reader has a past that is a part of this novel. There is no escape for anyone in the audience. Black readers must accept the suffering that was a part of their past, and white readers must accept the brutality that was a part of their past. (1996: 113)

Beloved sends a message about the importance of dealing with the past in order to move forward with the future. Since black people are an intrinsic part of the American nation, it is essential for both white and black people to accept what has happened, whether they were the

perpetrators or the victims, and in the same way as the community of women and Sethe at the end of *Beloved*, come together to eliminate the painful ghosts of the past and yet never forget them. As Zhu Ying insightfully observes: “History should not become another form of enslavement, which destroys and binds, neither should it be forgotten” (2006: 34). As crucial as it is to reclaim and memorialize history, it is also significant to come to terms with it, accept it as the fundamental aspect of the national milieu, and not allow it to interfere with the present moment. The characters of Beloved teach us that, no matter how difficult and painful the traumatic experiences are, it is possible to overcome them by acknowledging the history, reconnecting with the community, and learning to love oneself.

7 Conclusion

Toni Morrison's fiction explores the complex themes of racial, gender, and social issues, the power of memory and history, the impact of traumatic events, and the significance of family, community, and tradition, as well as the influence of all of these aspects on female identity construction. Since Morrison's areas of interest incorporate many different factors that shape the lives of black women, it was necessary to employ an intersectional analysis of the most prominent perspectives in Morrison's work, which included historical and political, social, black feminist, narratological, and psychoanalytical perspectives, with a particular emphasis on trauma studies. Exploration of the interconnectedness of these perspectives offered an insight into obstacles that female characters encountered on their road to self-discovery, the causes of the character's crises of self-definition, and shed light on all the challenges surrounding the lives of black females.

The concept of identity, especially the concept of construction of one's identity entails its ever-changing nature; many eminent identity theoreticians and scholars who discussed identity questions, such as John Locke, Erik H. Erikson, Roz Ivanič, etc., emphasize identity's perpetuating quality. Identity is constantly changing and evolving, and these changes occur due to historical, social, and cultural circumstances. Since identity can be seen as the product of various perspectives, it appeared necessary to analyze the interplay of these perspectives in exploring female identity construction in Toni Morrison's fiction.

Historical and political perspectives investigated how adverse historical and political circumstances in the form of bondage and its devastating consequences affected identity development. Black people suffered through atrocities of slavery, which included physical and psychological abuse, sexual and reproductive exploitation of women, and dehumanizing treatment, all of which were based on racist discrimination. Historical trauma affected not only the former slaves but also their descendants, who continued to experience racial, gender, and social oppression.

When it comes to social perspectives, many social obstacles hinder female characters' individuation processes, such as patriarchal expectations and tradition, gender roles assigned by patriarchal societies, economic and financial disadvantages resulting from racial discrimination, ethnically related questions of belonging as black people feel that they belong to neither Africa nor America and their low position on social hierarchy due to racial, gender and class oppression. Additionally, female characters' identity development is threatened by white and black people's adoption of the "white gaze" in their perception of black people, which might develop feelings of insecurity, racial self-loathing, and internalized racism, as well as the white and black men's adoption of the "male gaze" that objectifies black women.

Apart from historical and social perspectives, black studies profoundly impact female characters' journeys toward self-discovery. Black feminist perspectives emphasized the issues of racial disparity and discriminatory practices, with particular emphasis on the position of black females, as they suffered "the triple oppression" (Andersen and Collins, 2016: 7) as they occupied the lowest place on racial, gender, and social hierarchies. The triple oppression resulted in many racially discriminatory practices against black women, including the notion of sexual politics, according to which women were sexually and reproductively exploited. In addition to this, sexual politics also contributed to the creation of a negative image of black women who were wrongly labeled as promiscuous and hypersexual. The adoption of the "white gaze" in both black and white people's perception of black women additionally influenced their self-confidence, and it encouraged the development of internalized racism and black women's preference for white tradition and white standards of beauty over their own.

On the other hand, black feminist perspectives also focused their attention on the significance of the black community. Communal support and solidarity are fundamental aspects of black female identity, and the tradition of communal cooperation and sense of unity could be interpreted as the reaction to the historical and social contexts in the form of the institution of slavery and racial, gender, and social oppression and discriminatory practices that persisted long after the slavery was abolished.

On the subject of exploration of female identity development, in addition to the intersectional analysis of race, gender, and class, it was relevant to employ the narratological investigation of narrative techniques that reflected identity quests, traumatized experiences, and repressed memory. Morrison tells stories in a non-chronological order, changes viewpoints, and utilizes grotesque elements and ellipsis, attempting to depict what is considered to be "unspeakable" (Morrison 2019: 168). Moreover, Morrison gives voice to the marginalized characters, offering their points of view, and demands readers' participation and involvement in interpreting the narratives.

Finally, literary trauma studies and psychoanalytical perspectives offered remarkable insight into the exploration of female identity construction. Apart from going through individual traumas, female characters also suffer the collective traumas of slavery, racial violence, and discrimination, which can be considered transgenerational traumas as they are passed down to younger generations. The psychoanalytical perspectives also analyzed the impact of social relationships on characters, especially on motherhood and mother/daughter relationships, which represent the fundamental aspects of female characters' personalities in Morrison's fiction. Black motherhood differs significantly from white motherhood, as black mothers' ultimate expressions of love and care are the protective and preservative forms of love, where mothers try to keep their children safe and alive in the face of adverse historical and social circumstances. Additionally, black mothers were often deprived of their role because of slavery, physical and psychological abuse, and other discriminatory practices. These adverse historical and social circumstances resulted in numerous traumatized mother/daughter relationships.

Toni Morrison's first published novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), follows the identity construction of a young girl who, faced with numerous obstacles on the road to self-discovery, finds herself unable to deal with them all by herself, and thus sinks into insanity. Pecola develops an inferiority complex because of the dominant culture that considers only white people to be beautiful. Pecola's conviction that she is ugly comes from the elements of the dominant culture she is surrounded by, such as billboards, movie stars, and dolls; it is additionally supported by her dysfunctional family, as her mother is loving and caring toward the daughter of the white family she works for, while she completely neglects her children, and her father who rapes and impregnates her. Additionally, Pecola is assured that she is ugly by the members of the black community who consider themselves superior to Pecola since she occupies the lowest position on racial, gender, and social hierarchies as she is a poor black girl. The traumas of rape, pregnancy, and complete alienation from her family, friends, and the community, cause Pecola's irrational behavior and eventual fall into insanity, manifested in her conversations with an imaginary friend and her belief that she indeed got the blue eyes that she wished for. For Pecola, the blue eyes symbolize the love and acceptance by her family, friends, and community, which she desperately craves. Although Pecola believes her wish has come true, her hallucinations and fall into insanity represent the annihilation of her identity development.

Morrison juxtaposes Pecola's character with her friend Claudia. Despite the fact that the same difficult circumstances surround Claudia in terms of racial, gender, and social inferiority, Claudia's loving and caring family positively influences her self-confidence since Claudia is not self-conscious, does not long for blue eyes, and does not even want to play with

white dolls. Claudia rejects the dominant white culture and questions it, wondering what is inside the blue dolls that make them desirable and popular and why Maureen Peal, her fair-skinned classmate, is considered superior to her. Through the characterization of Claudia, Morrison suggests that cherishing one's heritage, characteristics, and natural beauty without striving to be like others is a defining aspect of young girls' journey to self-discovery.

The Bluest Eye also portrays Geraldine and Maureen Peal, two fair-skinned black women who believe in their superiority over other black people because of their light black skin and ample financial status. Because they consider themselves to be in a higher position on a racial and social hierarchy, they discriminate against Pecola, although they belong to the same racial category, and thus impede her identity development. Geraldine and Maureen Peal both display racial self-loathing and internalized racism by negating their black identity and identifying with white people. Since Maureen is Pecola's classmate, she illustrates that both peer violence and the school system are based on racism, as both teachers and students prefer students with lighter skin color. On the other hand, Geraldine exemplifies that even adults develop feelings of racial self-consciousness and internalized racism.

Another female character in the novel who prefers white tradition, which results in racial self-hatred, is Pecola's mother, Pauline. Pauline's unhappy marriage, her dissatisfaction with her physical appearance, and the doctor's perception of her through the white gaze during her childbirth experience by comparing her to an animal all contribute to Pauline's development of internalized racism that she passes down to her daughter. Apart from her inability to face and deal with obstacles on her path to self-actualization, Pauline also creates a hostile environment for her children, who spend the crucial years of identity development in a dysfunctional family.

Overall, *The Bluest Eye* demonstrates that Pecola's identity crisis happened as a result of the interconnectedness of many factors: oppressive historical, social, and cultural circumstances, racially discriminatory practices, an unsupportive community, abusive peers, and a dysfunctional family. The novel illustrates the consequences that might occur when the oppressive environment is joined by the lack of familial and communal support and care.

Morrison's second published novel, *Sula* (1973), tells the story of the identity development of two best friends who, due to their contrasting personalities and dissimilar reactions to their racial and social environment, follow a different road toward self-discovery. Sula is an independent and controversial woman who defies gender stereotypes, patriarchal roles, and traditional expectations of a black woman. The black community condemns Sula for what they consider to be an outrageous lifestyle; they frown upon her leaving the Bottom and spending a decade away from family and friends, for not getting married and having children, for being promiscuous and engaging in social relationships with white men and married men, and for placing her grandmother in a nursing home instead of caring for her. The black community's reaction to Sula's behavior shows that the negative portrayal of women created in the period of slavery still bothers them, as they support the controversial lifestyle of women and the fulfillment of gender roles. Still, Sula does not allow the social context and racial and gender tensions to define her, and she lives her life according to her own rules. However, despite Sula being different from the black community of the Bottom, she proves that a national sense of belonging is an intrinsic part of her personality when she chooses to come back to the Bottom and stay there permanently. However, although the black community does not interfere with Sula's return, she feels ostracized by her family, friends, and the overall black community.

Nevertheless, Sula's identity construction was impacted by more than just defiance of patriarchal and social constraints. Sula's life was marked by the traumas of her being a witness to her mother's and her friend, Chicken Little's death. These traumatic experiences, the racist and gender oppression she was exposed to, and the incident of Sula's overhearing her mother saying she did not like her contributed to Sula's emotional coldness and numbness, and willful

alienation from the black community and her family. However, when she falls in love with Ajax, Sula finds herself succumbing to patriarchal traditions and gender roles, showing that she is not immune to patriarchal constraints. Nonetheless, Ajax, defying patriarchy himself, does not respond well to Sula's displays of affection and commitment and abandons her. Therefore, Sula dies in the same way that she lived her whole life, alienated from family, friends, and the community.

By illustrating Sula's lifestyle and identity development, Morrison shows that her characterization resists the existence of binary oppositions, illustrating that it is not possible to categorize people, as they can simultaneously be good and evil and display right and wrong behavior. While the majority of Sula's family members and friends criticize her for her immoral lifestyle and blatant disregard for patriarchal tradition, Sula considers herself to be a good person as she lived her life how she desired. Consequently, it can be inferred that the ethical categorization of good and evil is a relative one and depends on individual value systems and personality traits.

Sula's grandmother Eva's identity path was marked by an extremely difficult mother role that she tried her best to achieve. On the one hand, Eva sacrificed her leg to provide financial means for her children and jumped out of the window in an attempt to save her daughter from burning, while on the other hand, she murdered her son, who could not deal with the war trauma and started using narcotics. In this way, Eva's journey to self-discovery was determined by the challenges of black motherhood in the 1920s, reflected in the poor economic situation and absentee husband and father of her children, forcing Eva to resort to drastic measures to ensure the well-being of her children.

Another important female character in *Sula* is Hannah, Sula's mother and Eva's daughter, who demonstrates the importance of a mother's actions and comments on the children's identity development. Hannah's promiscuity and her words that she does not like Sula affect Sula's future actions and viewpoints, as she decides against having a family and children. These comments perhaps even influence Sula's participation in Chicken's Little death and her reluctance to save her mother from dying. However, despite the fact that both mother and daughter engaged in casual relationships with men, the black community did not criticize Hannah, possibly because she fulfilled her patriarchal role and she did not engage with white men. Eventually, Hannah tragically dies by burning to death, and her mother and daughter's reactions during this incident speak volumes about Hannah's relationship with them; while her mother risks her life to rescue her, her daughter observes her mother dying.

Regarding Sula's best friend, it can be said that Nel is her complete opposite in terms of character traits and life decisions. Nel's identity development is defined by her patriarchal upbringing and efforts to fulfill the traditional gender roles of a housewife and mother. Nel's mother, Helene, who was ashamed of her origin, transferred her feelings of patriarchal duty and internalized racism to her daughter. Despite her attempt to achieve the roles that society assigns her, she does not live a happy and content life. Nel's identity crisis commences when her husband cheats on her with Sula. For Nel, losing her husband is an identity trauma since she never developed an individual sense of self. Her self-definition has always been related to other people, first her parents, then Sula, and finally her husband. However, Nel gradually manages to make significant progress on her road to self-discovery; first, she accepts her share of responsibility for Chicken Little's death, thus abandoning the belief in the existence of binary oppositions of good and evil; secondly, she realizes that she felt miserable and lonely because she lost Sula, and not because she lost her husband, admitting that their bond was unique as it helped them deal with complex racial, gender, and social circumstances surrounding the lives of black females.

In essence, *Sula* portrays the process of self-actualization of two girls, demonstrating how racist trauma, dysfunctional families, social and patriarchal conventions, and traumatic

experiences affect their identity development differently. Sula's pathway to adulthood is marked by independence and defiance of patriarchal rules and gender roles, while Nel's road to self-discovery is defined by blind adherence to patriarchal traditions. Additionally, traumatized mother/daughter relationships that seem to be reflective of historical, social, and racial circumstances prove to have a key influence on the female characters' identity construction. Nevertheless, despite the challenges they face, Sula and Nel learn that female friendship is the only steady relationship in their lives, one that outlasts all other familial, romantic, and communal relationships.

The next novel analyzed in the dissertation is *Tar Baby* (1981), which investigates female characters' quest for self-definition amid complex social dynamics, racial divisions, traumatized familial relationships, and violence. The protagonist Jadine is a modern black woman, educated and independent. Conflicting aspects of her identity cause Jadine's identity crisis; she was orphaned as a young girl and raised by her aunt and uncle, while the white people they worked for participated in Jadine's upbringing and provided financial means for her education. Consequently, as an adult, Jadine lives in Paris, studies at Sorbonne University, and works as a fashion model, which encourages Jadine to identify herself with the white world often, showing a greater appreciation of white cultural traditions than black heritage. One of the crucial moments that affects her identity development is Jadine's encounter with a woman in the Parisian supermarket who is the embodiment of a proud and authentic black woman in touch with her ancient properties and who spits at Jadine. This incident develops feelings of insecurity about Jadine's racial and cultural identity. Therefore, her identity is threatened because she denies her cultural identity, and her identity crisis draws attention to the identity problems of modern black women, as they find themselves unable to integrate into the white world while still cherishing their black heritage and ancestry. Jadine differs from previously discussed female characters in Morrison's fiction as white people do not discriminate against her, and she is privileged in terms of her physical appearance, social class, education, job prospects, and financial means. Additionally, by depicting a self-sufficient, educated, and beautiful black girl, Morrison shows that there are significant improvements in societal reactions to black womanhood; while Sula was ostracized for her lifestyle and choices, Jadine is accepted for who she is. Although the members of the black community do not alienate Jadine, they do criticize her for her disregard for ancient properties.

Additionally, Morrison draws attention to the issues impacting modern romantic relationships by portraying Son and Jadine's romance. When Jadine starts a relationship with Son, she realizes that, although they belong to the same race, their relationship cannot work out because of cultural and class problems. Jadine is educated and self-sufficient, while Son does not seem to care about education and only does menial jobs to make ends meet. Moreover, Jadine rejects black tradition, which she proves by not appreciating elements of black culture and by deciding not to take care of her elderly relatives; these acts are selfish and unacceptable, according to the members of the black community. On the other hand, Son shows great attachment to his all-black hometown Eloe where black people exercise total exclusion from the white world, resulting in the lack of educational and job opportunities.

Toward the end of the novel, Jadine abandons Son, considering their differences insurmountable, and makes significant improvements on her path toward individuation as she comes to understand that her feelings of happiness and safety, should not depend on other people, especially men and that she should provide them by and for herself. She also learns that pursuing certainty as safety is unattainable as one can never be truly and completely safe due to unpredictable events and complex social relationships with others. Her perspectives on life have changed, displaying a mature understanding of women's independence and freedom, which should occur independently of men.

When it comes to Jadine's aunt, her identity path has been marked by the resilience and strength of a woman who worked her whole life as a servant and who struggles with economic difficulties. Ondine and her husband Sydney do not have a child of their own, but they adopted their niece Jadine when she lost her parents. However, they failed in their parental role as they never taught Jadine the importance of black history and heritage, which is why Jadine does not want to take care of them in their old days and does not seem bothered that they are getting too old to work as servants. Ondine's character symbolizes the significance of the othermother, a woman who takes over the role of a mother when the child's birth mother is unable to do so, which is a very significant concept in black tradition. However, it also symbolizes that this role is a very complex one that also includes passing down knowledge about one's cultural heritage and ancestry, illustrating the consequences of failure to complete that role appropriately.

Another critical aspect of Ondine's personality is her belief in the existence of racial and social hierarchies. She displays internalized racism in her attitude toward Son, whom she considers to occupy the lower position on the hierarchy because of his financial and social status. She assumes that he is a rapist and criminal simply because he is black and poor. On the other hand, despite their racial difference, Ondine displays female solidarity when she keeps Margaret's secret. It is evident that Ondine shows a greater level of identification with white people than black people, which also perhaps influences Jadine to develop similar attitudes regarding her thoughts on racial questions.

When it comes to Margaret Street, she is different from other characters in racial and social terms by being a wealthy white woman, and her identity crisis illustrates that there are both similarities and dissimilarities between the identity crises of black and white women. Margaret's identity development is marked by alienation and loneliness; she was lonely while growing up as her parents neglected her, and she was lonely in her marriage, without a job, friends, and any responsibilities. Margaret is victimized by social conventions and the pressure she feels to fulfill patriarchal roles assigned to her. Her unhappiness with her marriage and marital roles manifests in her physical abuse of her son Michael, which was a secret that Margaret kept for years.

However, once Margaret's secret is revealed to her husband and the other residents of L'Arbe de la Croix, she verbalizes the traumatic experience she has been through and that she imposed on others, and she is finally able to come to terms with her trauma. While Margaret's identity crisis differs from the economic and social obstacles Ondine faces and questions of cultural and racial identity that Jadine struggles with, a parallel can be drawn between Margaret and Ondine as they both failed in certain aspects of motherhood, thus negatively influencing their children's identity development.

Taking everything into account, *Tar Baby* demonstrates that female characters' identity development is affected by their upbringing and environment, including their social relationships with others, especially men. Additionally, Morrison juxtaposes modern and traditional black women by implying that none of them prove to be a complete woman; while Jadine fulfills the educational, social, class, and career aspirations of modern black women, she neglects the cultural aspect of her identity; on the other hand, while women in Eloe take great pride in their appreciation of culture and tradition, they are unable to make economic and financial progress due to their insistence on ancestry and refusal to blend into the white tradition that offers educational and job opportunities. Therefore, Morrison suggests that a balance between appreciating the past and cultural heritage and acknowledging modern tradition might account for a successful road toward self-discovery.

The final novel analyzed in the dissertation is *Beloved* (1987), which follows the identity development of female characters deeply hurt by the consequences of slavery. The protagonist Sethe is a strong, proud, and dignified black woman whose identity path was marked by slavery, as all the aspects of her personality were harmed by bondage; her cultural

identity was negated as she did not have a chance to learn about her native language and cultural heritage; her family ties were broken as she never met her father while her slave mother attempted to escape and was murdered as a punishment for it. Despite the oppressive circumstances she lived in, Sethe shows great strength of character when she runs away from the slave plantation and restores her life, suppressing memories of the physical, sexual, and psychological abuse she experienced. The defining aspect of Sethe's personality is motherhood; since she did not have the ideal childhood, she wanted to overcompensate to her children by ensuring that they always have enough milk and that they are safe and protected at all costs. However, when she commits infanticide, she deepens the traumatic experience of slavery both for herself and her children, as her sons run away from home and the remaining daughter feels frightened of her and becomes socially awkward and introverted. Additionally, Sethe has to live with the painful memory that she murdered her daughter, although she insists that she acted appropriately given the situation, as she considers death a much better option than returning to slavery.

After infanticide, Sethe lives her life alienated from the black community and with haunting memories of traumatic past that she is unable to verbalize until the embodiment of her dead daughter's ghost comes to her house and forces her to speak about her unspeakable actions. Nevertheless, Beloved's prolonged visit also illustrates the dangers of dwelling on the past for too long, as Sethe starts deteriorating physically and mentally until Beloved leaves. Beloved's presence allows Sethe to come to terms with her traumatic experiences, and as difficult as this was for Sethe, she finally has a chance at a happy life, free from all the ghosts of the past.

Regarding Beloved's identity, this is one of the mysterious parts of the novel that is never revealed. Beloved could be the ghostly figure representing the trauma of slavery; more specifically, she could signify black people's struggles on the slave ship or children's experiences in slavery; Beloved could also be the symbol of the memorial to black victims that was never created, or the need to acknowledge the past both individually for Sethe and collectively for both black and white people. The novel suggests that interpretation of Beloved's identity changes with different characters as she represents something different for each of them; for Sethe and Denver, Beloved is the embodiment of the dead daughter and sister; for Paul D, Beloved represents suppressed painful memories, and feelings, for the black community she symbolizes the ghost of the past. Nevertheless, despite Beloved's effect seeming negative, she actually helped the characters overcome their traumas, which is a necessary step toward recovery.

Sethe's daughter Denver illustrates the scope of transgenerational trauma and the influence that slavery has on future generations. She grew up in a fragmented family and traumatic environment, with her father and brothers gone, her grandmother and sister dead, and her only company was her mother. When Denver finds out about her mother murdering her sister, she becomes socially awkward and introverted, alienating herself from the black community and her peers. However, when Beloved appears and occupies her mother's attention to the extent that Denver is neglected, Denver decides to break free from this traumatic environment, finds a job, starts focusing on her education and future, and reconnects with the community. Denver symbolizes the hope of future generations of black children who are able to finally break free from the traumas of colonization and try to live happier lives.

Another important character in *Beloved* is Baby Suggs, who experienced all the atrocities of slavery, and yet she found the strength to survive it all, although she did not know where her husband and children were. She found her purpose in becoming an unofficial preacher helping the black community overcome their traumatic experiences and finding comfort in her grandchildren and daughter-in-law, who successfully escaped slavery. When Baby Suggs' son buys off freedom for her, she realizes how little she knows about her

personality; she does not know her real name, she does not have any knowledge of African traditions, culture, and her native language, and she does not know what her talents are. When she becomes a free woman, she starts socializing with the black community members, spending time with her family, and even finding her true calling. However, when the black community betrays her and does not warn her daughter-in-law about the arrival of the slaveholder, which results in Sethe's infanticide, she sinks into depression and gives up on life. As has been demonstrated, Baby Suggs displays the strength of black womanhood and the ability of black women to survive even the most distressing traumatic experiences with the support of family and community. However, she also illustrates that the communal betrayal and brutal repercussions of slavery, such as infanticide, might destabilize and depress even the strongest people.

Overall, it may be said that *Beloved* explores how complex themes, such as the challenges of motherhood, the traumatic experience of slavery, physical and psychological abuse, the power of memory, the community, and the alienation from its members, have a powerful influence on the identity construction of female characters. One of the critical influences on female characters' identity development is the trauma of the past. Beloved as the embodiment of the past trauma shows the dangers of lingering on the past for too long and demonstrates that coming to terms with traumatic events is an essential step toward recovery. The novel also illustrates the role of the community on the road to self-discovery as their support may prove crucial for tackling traumatic issues, while their exclusion of an individual might have dire consequences. Additionally, the novel portrays the critical aspect of motherhood, and the damaging effects slavery had on the relationship between mothers and children. *Beloved* exemplifies that a successful road to self-discovery includes accepting the past, coming to terms with traumatic experiences, reconnecting with the community, and relearning to love oneself.

Apart from intending to shed light on all the challenges and obstacles that conflict with black women's identity construction, Morrison also aims to draw attention to the identity development of black women from the past, whose voices were never heard due to the oppressive environments they lived in. Tessa Roynon addresses this important purpose of Morrison's fiction:

> The author once said that though she could not change the future, she knew she could change the past. The way she does this is to approach the past through the personal lives of those whom the dominant culture has silenced, erased, or forgotten: an ugly black schoolgirl in *The Bluest Eye*, the servants in a millionaire's mansion in *Tar Baby*, a formerly enslaved mother in *Beloved*, women abused as children in *Love*" (2013: 13).

Morrison shares the experiences of women who belong to marginalized categories according to the positions they occupy on racial, social, and gender hierarchies. Due to their low status in society, their stories have not been historically discussed, and Morrison challenges the dominant tradition by exploring all the racial, social, and gender issues black women and girls have had to deal with throughout different periods of American history.

Additionally, Morrison's fiction speaks both to individuals and larger communities by emphasizing that an individual's sense of self is closely related to collective identity. With regard to this, Morrison considers it of paramount importance to acknowledge the unfair treatment of black people in the United States, including the institution of slavery and racially discriminatory practices that were perpetuated long after slavery was abolished. Gurleen Grewal suggests that this is Morrison's primary focus: "[…] the work of decolonization

demands an individual and collective response, a social and political engagement. To such work Toni Morrison has committed her entire literary career" (1998: x). While Morrison makes an individual contribution to addressing black people's marginalized positions throughout history, she believes that the collective reaction is necessary in order to help the black population overcome racial and social environments that undermine their collective identity.

In the discussion of Morrison's fiction, it is noteworthy to reiterate that Morrison's narratives finish with an open ending, or, in K.C. Lalthlamuani's words: "Instead of closures, Morrison's novels end with moments of insight" (2014: 19). The endings of Morrison's novels are thought-provoking as readers remain deprived of straightforward answers to complex racial, gender, and social questions, which encourages them to ponder these issues and their intersection in relation to one's identity construction.

However, when it comes to the subject matter of Toni Morrison's fiction, she explicitly states: "The search for love and identity runs through most everything I write" ("An Inspired Life" 1994: 278). As has been demonstrated in this dissertation, the journey toward self-discovery is a lifelong process that is fraught with many conflicting factors, and it is heavily influenced by the historical, social, and racial environment, as well as the impact of family, community, and social relationships. The encounters with traumatic experiences additionally contribute to the challenges on one's path toward self-actualization. As all the above points have illustrated, black women are often faced with additional challenges on their roads to self-discovery, such as the beauty standards established by dominant tradition, social commentary on whether or not they appreciate the cultural heritage and ancestry and fulfill patriarchal gender roles, the negative image of black women, especially when it comes to their sexual identity, sexual and reproductive exploitation, and violence that is directed at black women from both white and black men. Additionally, the perception of black women through the white and male gazes has often resulted in their development of internalized racism and racial self-loathing. However, Morrison illustrates that, despite the obstacles that an individual inevitably encounters, recovery from traumatic experiences and oppressive environments is possible with the support of community and family and with an individual's self-acceptance and self-love. On the other hand, Morrison also exemplifies that the communal betrayal and harmful consequences of slavery and colonization, such as infanticide and the instances of racial discrimination in the forms of imposed beauty standards, might cause irreparable damage to female identity construction.

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Edita Bratanović was born on 28 June 1991 in Brčko, Bosnia and Herzegovina. She received both her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English language, literature, and culture from the Faculty of Philology in Belgrade. Following her passion for research and education, she embarked on her Ph.D. studies at the same institution in 2016.
Throughout her academic career, she has shown a deep interest in English literature. Her research work has focused on various topics, such as feminist criticism, literary trauma studies, and intersectional approaches to analyzing literature through historical and social perspectives. She has published several articles in peer-reviewed journals and has presented her research papers at numerous international conferences, including conferences in Belgrade (6th International Conference of the English department – Belgrade English Language and Literature Studies BELLS90), Oxford (Global Conference on Women's Studies), Berlin (International Conference on Social Science, Humanities, and Education), Dubai (International Conference on Social Science, Literature, Economic and Education), and Australia (International Conference on English and American Studies).
Apart from her academic pursuits, she is interested in teaching and currently works as an English teacher.

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